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"Where there is no vision the people perish"

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REVIEW

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LOUIS MACNEICE AND LAWRENCE
DURRELL ANALYSED

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POETS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

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Louis MacNeice : An Appreciation

LOUIS MacNeice has probably written less "pure" poetry than any other contemporary poet who has achieved, as he has, some sort of reputation. Much of his work, especially his earlier work, appears from a casual reading to drift so near to the sargasso sea of verse (as opposed to the endlessly changing ocean of poetry) that it would be easy to dismiss him as unimportant, were it not for his individuality and gift for uncovering the truth, often incidentally, by brilliant surface descriptions of the trivial things in contemporary life that mean—or at least meant before the war—so much to the average Britisher. This gift is backed by technical ability, not always immediately apparent, which suits the subjects on which he chooses to write.

MacNeice, who was born in Ireland in 1907, the same year as Auden, shows more affinity for the latter than any other among his exact contemporaries. He has also certain qualities in common with Eliot, as we shall see; and yet he remains essentially an individualist in his outlook and in the reflections of that outlook which have been published as his poems. His work as a poet so far pivots on his long poem, "Autumn Journal". Before he wrote this diary in verse of a Londoner during Autumn, 1938—the time of Munich and looming war clouds—"Poems" (1935) and "The Earth Compels" (1938) had been published and had already laid the foundations of his reputation. A play, "Out of the Picture", and an excellent translation of the Agamemnon of Aeschylus also appeared before "Autumn Journal", as did "Letters from Iceland" in which he collaborated with W. H. Auden to produce an unusual travel book partly in prose, partly in verse. Since "Autumn Journal", "Plant and Phantom" (1940) and "Springboard" (1944) have continued his progress as a poet, while his successful radio drama, "Christopher Columbus" (1944), although its impact when read in cold print without music and the other assets of the broadcast version is inevitably lessened, confirms his potentialities as a dramatist foreshadowed in the very first poem in his first book ("Eclogue for Christmas").*

And, together with poetry, radio drama is his most natural medium. (He has been working with the B.B.C. during the war.) In his stage play "Out of the Picture" he never achieves coherence; an impression of unevenness and incompleteness is left with the reader—and I should imagine with an audience, although I have not seen the play. Further, all that MacNeice says in this play could have been better said, and has to a large extent been better said, in his poems.

But in his radio drama, "Christopher Columbus", as well as in his several shorter broadcast works so far unpublished, MacNeice is in his true element—the poetic drama adapted for the radio, in which he is a pioneer. "Christopher Columbus" is prefaced by an essay on radio drama. As a condensed summary of a new and comparatively unexplored form of art—for it is an art—this has not yet been equalled. Edward Sackville-West, in his introduction to "The Rescue", another first-class example of radio drama, acknowledges the merit of MacNeice's essay.

Before leaving the subject to return to MacNeice's poetry proper, it should be noted that by the expression "radio drama" I mean works written specially for the microphone and loudspeaker, and which are never intended for the stage: this is a very different thing from a radio adaptation of a stage play. The latter does not reach the audience in the way the original author meant it to do

* All these books are published by Faber and Faber. An early book of poems, "Blind Fireworks", was published in Ireland before 1935.

and at the best can give only "a second-hand impression. Radio drama by my definition is "created" with the sole purpose of being conveyed to the audience by means of sound, and sound alone. Sound here includes music and effects besides voices, judiciously varied to fit the characters, characters who can only describe themselves, their surroundings and the situations in which they find themselves by the spoken word. Neither the visual help of the stage nor of the printed word, which are present when a play is seen or read, assist a wireless audience.

Since the aural approach is the only one possible, radio drama might be said to be the beginning of a new kind of music with enormous possibilities. It is conceivable that it will bring poetry to the people once more; the connection has been severed since the early seventeenth century and in radio drama (not the stage) lies the most promising chance of re-establishing that much-needed link. Radio drama has a big future and should develop rapidly during the next decade.

To return to MacNeice's poetry: up to and including the turning point of "Autumn Journal" he writes mainly of his own reactions to contemporary life, i.e., subjectively. But since then he has developed, not only by branching off into radio drama, but also, as his latest book of poems ("Springboard") shows, by writing more objectively: and with the personal approach he has discarded the surface glitter of description which made the best of his work up to "Autumn Journal" so attractive, relevant and immediate in impact, and the worst of it slightly monotonous.

In his newest poems, however, there is more universality of treatment, that common ideal towards which all poets ultimately direct their pens; there is a greater spiritual strength and, technically, more assurance. Even if the bricks with which he builds are essentially the same, the cement that binds the bricks together is of a better—and a more enduring—quality. I quote here from one of these later poems for comparison with extracts from his earlier poems reproduced later in this essay:—

We were the past—and doomed because
We were a past that never was;
Yet grant to men that they may climb
This time-bound ladder out of time
And by our human organs we
Shall thus transcend humanity.

And, as "Springboard" contains poems written between 1941 and 1944, the war is the subject of many of them, either directly or obliquely: although "Springboard" is by no means a collection of war poems.

* * *

MacNeice's first book ("Poems") reveals him as a recorder of the surface of society in the thirties, with an occasional vision of the troubled waters below the sunlit ripples of contemporary life that was soon to become contemporary death, chaos and war. In "Eclogue for Christmas", a conversation between a town and a country dweller, he puts these words into the mouth of the former:—

The jaded calendar revolves,
Its nuts need oil, carbon chokes the valves,
The excess sugar of a diabetic culture
Rotting the nerve of life and literature; . . .

And later in the same poem, he touches on the theme that becomes more and more dominant in his pre-war work, until in "Autumn Journal" it is the thread binding the whole together:—

What will happen when the sniggering machine-guns
in the hands of the young men
Are trained on every flat and club and beauty parlour
and father's den?

And the answer, a curiously disturbing conclusion:—

What will happen will happen; the whore and the buffoon
Will come off best; no dreamers, they cannot lose their dream
And are at least likely to be reinstated in the new regime.

No other modern poet has depicted the dying throes of the life that was swept away by the war as directly or as vividly as MacNeice; even Eliot does not present so many descriptive facets:—

But life was comfortable, life was fine
With two in a bed and patchwork cushions
And checks and tassels on the washing-line,
A gramophone, a cat, and the smell of jasmine.
The steaks were tender, the films were fun,
The walls were striped like a Russian ballet,
There were lots of things undone. . . .

This typical extract from "Autumn Journal" illustrates both his subjective surface description and in the last line his pre-occupation with the reckoning to come after the feast of easy, blind living. The meiosis of "There were lots of things undone" following the catalogue of luxury is effective.

There is a latent social reformer beneath the poet's cloak. He foresaw not only war, but also social disintegration and revolution. The war has come, but his latest poems are, strangely it may seem, less violent and glittering, both in form and content. The undercurrent of reform and revolution in his early poems has broadened to help to make a more tranquil stream of better poetry; there is less politics, but a stronger and more permanent, but still vital poetry. And the reformer still finds expression, but with a clearer message.

Although circumstances made him mainly a town dweller, he hankers spasmodically after the country, finding it, not the ideal, but rather the less rotten of two decaying aspects of a doomed way of life; in "Turf Stacks", an early poem about his native Ireland, he makes a significant contrast:—

Among these turf-stacks graze no iron horses
Such as stalk, such as champ in towns and the soul of crowds,
Here is no mass-production of neat thoughts
No canvas shrouds for the mind nor any black hearses:
The peasant shambles on his boots like hooves
Without thinking at all or wanting to run in grooves.

But even in the country he can find no solution:—

My country will not yield you any sanctuary,
There is no pin-point in any of the ordnance maps
To save you when your towns and town-bred thoughts collapse,
It is better to die *in situ* as I shall,
One place is as bad as another. Go back where your instincts call
And listen to the crying of the town-cats and the taxis again,
Or wind your gramophone and eavesdrop on great men.

Another recurring theme in these early poems is the dullness of suburban life and the pity of it under the shadow of the approaching disruption:—

The small householder now comes out warily
Afraid of the barrage of sun that shouts cheerily,

Spring is massing forces, birds wink in the air,
 The battlemented chestnuts volley green fire,
 The pigeons banking on the wind, the hoots of cars,
 Stir him to run wild, gamble on horses, buy cigars;
 Joy lies before him to be ladled and lapped from his hand—
 Only that behind him, in the shade of his villa, memories stand
 Breathing on his neck and muttering that all this has happened before, . . .
 (which is incidentally a good example of his brittle lyricism); and in a poem called
 "Sunday Morning" he concludes:—

. . . there is no music or movement which secures
 Escape from the weekday time. Which deadens and endures.

This "time which deadens and endures" was the life he had to live for a while, against his instincts, but perhaps not against his inclination as a man. The appeal of many of his poems derives from a bleak nostalgia which infuses his descriptions of the world he saw crumbling, but for the pleasures of which he is honest enough to admit a personal fascination:—

Sharp sun-stop, surface gloss and momentary caprice,
 These are what we cherish
 Caring not if the bridges and the embankments
 Of past and future perish and cease;
 Before the leaves grow heavy and the good days vanish
 Hold out your glasses which our April must replenish.

There is not much doubt that he is speaking for himself there; later, in "Autumn Journal", this attitude changes to something more like self-recrimination.

"The Earth Compels", his second book of poems, continues, and here and there repeats, the dissection and analysis, in the same style. But one poem—"Carrickfergus"—is entirely and directly autobiographical:—

I was born in Belfast between the mountain and the gantries
 To the hooting of lost sirens and the clang of trams . . .
 I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,
 Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor;
 The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept
 With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure. . . .
 I went to school in Dorset, the world of parents
 Contracted into a puppet world of sons
 Far from the mill girls, the smell of porter, the salt-mines
 And the soldiers with their guns.

And since MacNeice went to school in Dorset, he has become more and more English and less and less Irish in his outlook.

In "The Earth Compels" too are the poems he wrote as a result of his visit to Iceland with Auden before the war. "Letters from Iceland" contains the complete account in prose and verse by both authors:—

And all go back	The cape which night
Relapse to rock	Will spread to cover
Under the shawl	The world when the living
Of the ice-caps,	Flags are furled.

is the last verse of his unusually sombre poem "Iceland". But there is no doubt that the desolate bareness of that country impressed, inspired and appealed to him, reminding him perhaps of the bogs and mists and moors of Ireland. For his poems about Ireland are tinged with the same mood:—

On those islands

The west wind drops its messages of indolence
 No one hurries, the Gulf Stream warms the gnarled
 Rampart of gneiss, the feet of the peasant years
 Pad up and down their sentry-beat not challenging
 Any comer for the password—only Death
 Comes through unchallenged in his general's cape.

Notice how he prepares the way for the sudden entrance of Death and the aptness of the "general's cape" image.

And yet, he often rails against Ireland, seeing its faults in spite of his own sentimental ties with the country:—

The land of scholars and saints:
 Scholars and saints my eye, the land of ambush,
 Purlblind manifestoes, never ending complaints,
 The born martyr and the gallant ninny;
 The grocer drunk with the drum,
 The landowner shot in his bed, the angry voices
 Piercing the broken fanlight in the slum,
 The shawled woman weeping at the garish altar.

"Eclogue from Iceland"—a poem and another portent of his dramatic capabilities—is worked out with four voices: Craven and Ryan, visitors from Europe, meet the ghost of Grettir, an Icelandic hero on Arnarvatn Heath; there is also a "voice from Europe". To quote from such a long and elaborate work is difficult but the following are the closing lines, which also contain the message of the poem. Grettir's ghost is addressing the European visitors:—

Grettir: Minute your gesture but it must be made—
 Your hazard, your act of defiance and hymn of hate,
 Hatred of hatred, assertion of human values,
 Which is now your only duty.

Craven: Is it our only duty?

Grettir: Yes, my friends.

What did you say? The night falls now and I
 Must beat the dales and chase my remembered acts.
 Yes, my friends, it is your only duty.

And, it may be added, it is your only chance.

This was of course written when war clouds were gathering over Europe. It is worth noting how much more closely it resembles drama than formal poetry; yet it was published as a poem.

The last poem in "The Earth Compels" (Epilogue, for W. H. Auden), breathes a hint of the premonition which pervades "Autumn Journal":—

Down in Europe Seville fell,
 Nations germinating hell,
 The Olympic games were run—
 Spots upon the Aryan sun. . . .

Our prerogatives as men
 Will be cancelled who knows when
 Still I drink your health before
 The gun-butt raps upon the door.

In this poem, written as a retrospective summing up of the Iceland trip, he approaches more closely to the style of Auden than anywhere else.

At times one gets the impression that MacNeice indulges in fits of gloating

over the impending fate of his careless generation:—

... the moon's glare,
Goggling yokel-stubborn through the iron trees,
Jeers at the end of us, our bland ancestral ease;
We shall go down like palaeolithic man
Before some new Ice Age or Genghiz Khan.

But in "Autumn Journal", which, besides being a chronicle of London and indeed England at a critical time in the history of that country, is also a personal record of a poet, it is clear that MacNeice accuses himself as much as his fellow-men of the sins for which he sees retribution gathering in the form of war clouds:—

None of our hearts are pure, we always have mixed motives,
Are self deceivers, but the worst of all
Deceits is to murmur "Lord, I am not worthy"
And, lying easy, turn your face to the wall.
But may I cure that habit, look up and outwards
And may my feet follow my wider glance
First no doubt to stumble, then to walk with the others
And in the end—with time and luck—to dance.

This long poem is a valuable record of the twilight of the gaudy interwar day as seen by a poet, a day whose dusk is shot through both with the remembered, quickly vanishing glimmers of:—

... the easy days
When all I thought of was affection and comfort,
Petting and praise;

(again we find self accusation) and with the bristling menace of the armoured night which was shortly to spread a dark, suffocating blanket over the past and the present, a screen under whose cover new ideas and ideals were to be formed, new directions determined and MacNeice's prophecies of horror to become hard facts:— International betrayals, public murder,

The devil quoting scripture, the traitor, the coward, the thug
Eating dinner in the name of peace and progress,
The doped public sucking a dry dug;
Official recognition of rape, revival of the ghetto
And free speech gagged and free
Energy scrapped and dropped like surplus herring
Back into the barren sea;
Brains and beauty festering in exile,
The shadow of bars

Falling across each page, each field, each raddled sunset, . . .

"Autumn Journal" is a remarkable achievement, running to almost a hundred pages of narrative with digressions on several of those themes which were prominent in the poet's mind at that time. The central theme is of course the Munich crisis and the threat of war: the digressions cover such widely different subjects as Oxford, Spain, Ireland, women (or rather one woman), the Greeks, contemporary society and the ever recurring, but never in his case egotistical subject of himself. It is a sustained expansion of some of his earlier short poems, and is, I believe, more truly inspired than anything else he has written before or since, in spite of its length. Reading "Autumn Journal" one feels every now and then that the poet must have exhausted his fund of ideas on his central theme; but one turns the page and is carried off again on a slightly different, but still sparkling, autobiographical-cum-analytical stream. And the whole thing, with all its

topicality, its surface glitter and employment of the first person *is* a poem—perhaps the most successful, if not in fact the best, long poem published between 1930 and 1940. The greatest virtue of “Autumn Journal” is that it remains essentially readable from beginning to end and, with all the digressions, which are the body of the poem (the narrative element is small and acts mainly as a series of starting points for the digressions), represents a complete statement of the author’s views at the time.

There is no doubt that “Autumn Journal” will date; indeed it has done so already, but the future will be able to turn back to find vivid documentation and a truer guide to “Munich time” than most of the prose that has since been spawned by biased politicians and others can offer. These have all some personal axe to grind: MacNeice in “Autumn Journal” is above that.

Two of the digressions mentioned are especially interesting: the Greeks and woman.

MacNeice taught Greek in his early days before he became well known as a poet and began to work with the B.B.C. His attitude towards the Greeks is fairly illustrated in the following passage:—

These dead are dead
And when I should remember the paragons of Hellas
I think instead
Of the crooks, the adventurers, the opportunists,
The careless athletes and the fancy boys,
The hair splitters, the pedants, the hard-boiled sceptics . . .
. . . and the women pouring
Libations over graves
And the trimmers at Delphi and the dummies at Sparta and lastly
I think of the slaves.

He saw the Greeks, his sight unclouded by any academic bias, with an open mind and a real desire to recreate life as it was then in terms of the present, of the times and the world he knew. The ultimate pessimism of his philosophy at this stage is evident in the bleak implication that even the metal of the Golden Age of Greece was veined with less pure materials. And the same authentic pessimism lies in the conclusion that the whore and the buffoon will come off best.

But was he not right, as far back as 1935 when he wrote these words; have not the whore and the buffoon, with nothing pretentious, no mask of false values to lose, fared as well as anyone and better than most in the last eight years? They have been superficially happier, less mentally perturbed than the majority of war-riddled mankind groping for a faith to follow in place of the old false faiths with which they doped themselves between the wars. And even war profiteers, pacifists, black marketeers and war heroes have their bad dreams. However shocking this conclusion may appear it must be admitted to contain a large grain of plain truth. MacNeice does not, however, imply that the world should be peopled by prostitutes and fools. He is in reality only saying indirectly and more elaborately what the Greeks said, and which he repeats in:—

. . . The days grow worse, the dice are loaded
Against the living man who pays in tears for breath;
Never to be born was the best, call no man happy
This side death.

“The living man who pays in tears for breath” is the average man of our time; it does not include the “whore and the buffoon” who do not know the meaning of paying for anything, far less breath (or life) itself, with tears. Their

happiness is impermanent and shallow and a better world can never rise from such ostrich-like foundations: it is necessary to work through suffering to an ultimately better world:—

. . . a possible land
Not of sleep-walkers, not of angry puppets,
But where both heart and brain can understand
The movements of our fellows;
Where life is a choice of instruments and none
Is debarred his natural music, . . .

In that extract can be traced echoes of the philosophy of such men as Herbert Read and Eric Gill. "The artist is not a special kind of man; every man is a special kind of artist" has become so hackneyed that we tend to swallow it as a clever paradox, forgetting that in it Eric Gill was expressing his heartfelt wish and that it is the core of Gill's philosophy.

Secondly, woman, which means in the case of MacNeice, different aspects of one woman, who represents the whole sex. We know, since he dedicates his first book of poems to his wife, that he was married before he started to publish poetry. And in "Autumn Journal" he says:—

And I notice feathers sprouting from the rotted
Silk of my black
Double eiderdown which was a wedding
Present eight years back;

which fixes the date of his wedding. The significance of this does exist: it explains why MacNeice has written no love poetry in the true sense of the term; it explains his acceptance of suburban life; it explains his power to describe so intimately domestic trifles while also predicting, with a touch of regret, their obsolescence; it explains:—

I shall remember you in bed with bright
Eyes or in a cafe stirring coffee
Abstractedly and on your plate the white
Smoking stub your lips had touched with crimson.

And I shall remember how your words could hurt
Because they were so honest
And even your lies were able to assert
Integrity of purpose.

And later, expressing a more general opinion, but still basing it on one person, he says—

For, where there is the luxury of leisure,
There should also be the luxury of women.
I do not need you on my daily job
Nor yet on any spiritual adventure,
Not when I earn my keep but when I rob
Time of his growth of tinsel.

Here, "you" refers to a particular person; it is not used in the plural—this is made clear in the rest of the context which is not quoted.

These passages also suggest what is, I think, true of MacNeice: that he puts the physical in woman above the intellectual or the spiritual. And when he tries in his poems to express any but a physical outlook on sex, he fails.

But MacNeice suffers neither from excess of sensuality or of intellectualism: although he indulges in outbursts of each, his final aspirations are balanced,

when he does express them, and show a sense of his own and society's imperfections:— All that I would like to be is human, having a share

In a civilised, articulate and well adjusted
Community where the mind is given its due
But the body is not distrusted.

Or:—

. . . we cannot ever
Live by the soul alone; the soul without the stomach
Would find its glory gone.

The sudden purpose, the message which keeps cropping up throughout his work redeem him from the danger of being classed as a virtuoso, for no one can deny his ability to present important truths in a palatable way. He is never obscure; his words can have only one meaning and in a period when poetry, even good poetry, is often clouded by some form of indirectness, MacNeice remains completely intelligible: he is thus liable to be mis-called "slight".

Just as surely and sensitively as Eliot recognised the rot beneath the surface of the social fabric in the twenties, MacNeice ten years later sees the increasing softening beneath the surface of the thirties. His poems do not reflect such a penetrating analysis of the trouble, he rarely probes to the depths, but he is the Eliot of the thirties. He performs the same function in his own way, by describing only the scum on the surface, without going much deeper, even admitting a certain predisposition to wallow in the scum here and there. Since then Edith Sitwell, in her wonderful recent poems, has returned to the depths, the roots, the bone, seeking more fundamentally than Eliot even, and finding a solution which is so simple that it is difficult to grasp.

But MacNeice, until his recent development, was always essentially in touch with the leaves, the flesh, the surface rather than the roots and the bone and the depths. He is the best poetic recorder of the contemporary scene in the thirties and he flavours his record with a whimsical mixture of his own nature, and politics, psychology, sex and a lot of brightly honest introspection—in fact all the assets and liabilities which are, for better or worse, the birthright of every "modern" poet.

The reasonable conclusion to draw is that he has yet to prove himself a true poet by going beneath the surface and bringing back permanent poetry; that so far he has spent all his talents on the flesh without attempting to touch the bone. And in "Springboard"—and in his radio plays—there are indications of this fulfilment. For whatever he may have been in the past, his latest poems must be considered as a development. He is saying the same things as before, but with so much more breadth and depth, that the poems in "Springboard" seem to be the utterances of a different person, a more sober and sombre person, from the author of "Poems" and "Autumn Journal". He has learned too the value and the art of economy—the scintillating but sprawling raciness, a sort of journalism, in his earlier work gives way to a more restrained and disciplined poetry from which superfluities have been pruned and which he has tightened technically to a more forcible terseness of expression. And here and there, a line shows that he has been beneficially influenced by the Elizabethan poets.

For example compare the explosive effect of this verse (from "Poems"):

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various;

with the following, from "Springboard":—

For it is true, surprises break and make,
As when the baton falls and all together the hands
On the fiddle-bows are pistons, or when crouched above
His books the scholar suddenly understands
What he has thought for years—or when the inveterate rake
Finds for once that his lust is becoming love.

Surprise is the motif in each of these verses; and yet how much finer as poetry is the second quotation. This greater steadiness is typical of the change in his work since 1941.

His philosophy also has altered, has become less pessimistic: the MacNeice of the pre-war years would never have written so hopefully:—

And though to-day is arid,
We know—and knowing bless—
That rooted in futurity
There is a plant of tenderness.

This is a hope, simply but adequately expressed, for the future of man; man with whom he groups himself now as always, and of whom he can now write:—

. . . For we are unique, a conscious
Hoping and therefore despairing creature, the final
Anomaly of the world, we can learn no method
From whales or birds or worms;
Our end is our own to be won by our own endeavour
And held on our own terms.

This is not optimism; but it is as much hope as we can allow ourselves in the present state of the world, and it is the sort of yardstick we need for the spiritual reconstruction which must be attempted. It is also unmistakably the voice of a poet who has a message and is beginning to deliver it. Louis MacNeice's next book of poems will be important.

R. L. Cook.

Asoka

(Famous Buddhist Emperor of India, third century B.C.; renounced career of conquest to devote himself to the arts of peace.)

WHERE peacocks trailed their skirts among the trees
And elephants went trumpeting abreast
He rolled through India, hot with victories,
Then suddenly paused; threw down his sword and crest,
Stared in torn horror at the bloodied fields,
And felt his cruelty wound him like a blow.
Then back he marched, ashamed, to seek those yields
Of truth and learning peace alone can sow.

And twenty centuries and more have fled,
And all his battles fought and triumphs gained
Are less than windy murmurs where the dead
Lie in old silted tombs. Yet he has reigned
Down all these ages in men's reverent sight,—
Servant of Love, and Prince of Law and Light.

Stanton A. Coblentz.

Quelques Reflexions sur le Problème Poétique en France

POUR le lecteur non averti des difficultés et des quasi-impossibilités d'expression auxquelles se heurtait le poète à chaque expérience, la poésie française d'avant-guerre pouvait paraître bien éclectique et somme toute bien décevante. Il n'y avait pas d'école poétique organisée, pas même des tendances fixes, seulement des jaillissements plus ou moins arbitraires.

Après l'expérience surréaliste qu'on ne peut déceimment ignorer car elle s'est imposée dans le temps comme la conséquence logique d'un passé qui en portait déjà le germe, la poésie française contemporaine semblait s'éparpiller et, toute tendue qu'elle était vers la recherche d'elle-même dans son essence, ne parvenait pas à se réaliser en tant que création de l'esprit humain, complète et définitive. Certes les poètes de talent ne manquaient pas, mais ils se sentaient contraints de refouler l'instinct poétique qui était en eux par le souci trop méticuleux de s'inscrire dans la suite logique du surréalisme. Mais si l'on se pose la question d'une manière purement objective, peut-il y avoir une suite logique au surréalisme? Le surréalisme n'a-t-il pas abouti à un "cul de sac idéologique" dont il est apparemment impossible de sortir sans retourner sur ses pas? Le surréalisme s'est engagé trop avant sur le plan de l'esprit pour qu'il soit encore possible de le poursuivre sans risquer de se perdre dans une nuit sans repères. La poésie marchait à tâtons et se cognait à chaque angle contre des murs d'impossibilités. Cependant il fallait sortir de ce labyrinthe sous peine d'y mourir. Le problème poétique était là, flagrant, sans solution apparente en dehors de la réalité. Car se trouver soi en tant que sujet humain, c'est aussi prendre contact de plein pied avec une réalité-objet visible et palpable.

En 1939 la poésie agonisait dans cette impasse. Alors la guerre. Alors l'homme tout à coup rendu à sa condition d'homme.

Sans la guerre nous ne serions peut-être jamais parvenus à retrouver la lumière. Nous lui devons ce bienfait. Par les blessures qu'elle nous a infligées, elle a rendu perceptible à nos sens une réalité que nous ne connaissions plus et cependant la seule : la réalité humaine.

Ainsi le poète est-il redevenu un homme et un homme physique qui souffre et qui espère—qui vit, alors que le surréalisme avait fait de lui, sans le vouloir mais par un curieux renversement de ses conceptions premières, un être abstrait—pour tout dire inexistant—auquel une constante plongée dans l'inconscient avait fait perdre tout contact avec l'humanité collective. Cette tour d'ivoire, cet hermétisme systématique, étaient-ce les buts que s'étaient fixés les surréalistes? Non, bien sur; mais ce furent cependant les résultats particulièrement sensibles de leur expérience.

La poésie a donc repris contact avec un monde qu'elle avait trop longtemps ignoré. C'est ce que certains ont appelé avec mépris la poésie de circonstance et ce que d'autres ont appelé avec un sentiment plus nuancé la poésie engagée. Après cinq ans d'une guerre qui a fait saigner le cœur de l'homme, le poète est maintenant obligé de prendre en considération le monde par lequel lui a été révélé sa propre réalité, et de le regarder en face, avec lucidité. Ramassé sur lui-même dans la boue des peuples, il a enfin entendu descendre jusqu'à lui le grand rôle de l'humanité mutilée qui le pressait de sortir de ses cavernes pour qu'il prenne sa défense. Ainsi de tous côtés, depuis les camps de prisonniers et Allemagne jusque dans les maquis de la Résistance, a jailli sourdement d'abord

comme dans un demi-sommeil puis de plus en plus puissamment la voix du Poète.

Mais ce retour à la lucidité, à la réalité humaine ne s'est pas fait sans heurts. Certains poètes l'ont catégoriquement refusé au nom de théories déclarées périmées pas les événements eux-mêmes et d'autres ne l'ont accepté qu'avec méfiance. Cependant on ne saurait trop être satisfait de cet obligatoire renversement de la conception de la poésie et de son objet, car de nouveau, le poète, reprenant corps avec la vie, se reconnaît dans l'homme, dans tous les hommes et, pour tout dire, se place à hauteur d'homme.

Certes, cette logique et salutaire réaction de l'esprit peut paraître bien modeste et, somme toute, bien peu marquante, si, en lisant les poèmes nouveaux, nous n'en considérons que la forme—encore fortement imprégnée de l'influence surréaliste—et c'est ce qui les rend à priori un peu déconcertants. Mais pourrait-il en être autrement après une expérience de vingt années qui ne laissa personne indifférent? Et d'ailleurs, il ne serait pas bon de rejeter le surréalisme en bloc, car, bien qu'il ne nous satisfasse plus sur le plan de l'esprit, il ne faut pas négliger son apport considérable dans l'expression poétique qu'il a débarrassée de son absurde rhétorique et de son conformisme traditionnel.

C'est pourquoi nous accueillons comme un heureux présage ce retour à l'humain que nous devons considérer comme la première étape—et la plus importante—de la renaissance poétique de notre temps.

Cette tendance nouvelle que nous avons essayé de définir en l'opposant, à la lumière des événements, à celles qui l'ont précédée n'est pas seulement sensible chez les poètes de la génération de l'entre-deux-guerres comme Paul Eluard ou Louis Aragon dont les œuvres de ces dernières années marquent très nettement chez eux l'évolution de la pensée vers ce que nous serions tentés d'appeler un humanisme circonstanciel, mais elle apparaît encore plus clairement chez les jeunes poètes dont la renommée s'est établie en France depuis la Libération. C'est à dessein que nous n'avons pas l'intention dans cet article de nous étendre sur les œuvres de ces grands pontifes (auxquels nous devons ajouter Jacques Prévert et Raymond Queneau qui se sont faits connaître bien avant la guerre par leur action parfois intempestive dans le mouvement surréaliste) car de nombreuses traductions en ont été faites qui ont permis au public anglais de prendre contact avec elles de la manière la plus directe.

La plupart des jeunes poètes français sont issus de la Résistance et ils ont gardé de cette exaltante épopée en plus du goût de la Liberté cette espèce de "sympathie navigable du peuple" dont parle Henri Pichette. De nouveau ils ont ouvert les écluses qui les séparaient du reste de l'humanité.

Certes ils ne se font pas d'illusions sur les vertus de l'homme qu'ils défendent, mais s'ils acceptent tout de même de demander justice en son nom, c'est qu'ils se savent maintenant solidaires de ceux à qui ils parlent, pour qui ils parlent.

"Mes frères, écoutez-moi, je suis le Camarade. Tout autour de moi d'invisibles bras luttent et sèment

"et pressent contre ma poitrine la liberté.

"Mon front touche aux prisons; dans vos chaines c'est moi—et je souffle pas dessus les têtes des bourreaux

"le printemps des camarades avec sa lumière et sa voix."

Extraits du "Printemps des Camarades" de Loys Masson.

Cependant à quoi bon cette lutte et ce sacrifice puisque de toutes façons et quoi qu'on fasse l'équation de l'expérience humaine donne une solution nulle

et puisque le poète, maintenant lucide, en est convaincu?

"Quand je remettrai mon ardoise au Néant
 "un de ces prochains jours
 "il ne me ricanera pas à la gueule
 "mes chiffres ne sont pas faux
 "ils font un zéro pur . . ."

—*Épithaphe, André Frénaud.*

La réponse à ce problème aux données contradictoires réside dans la nécessité de vivre en surmontant l'absurde logique du monde par une sorte d'impératif catégorique de rendre la vie possible, fut-ce au prix du tragique échec de l'esprit. D'ailleurs, bien qu'il sache sa route semée d'embûches et sans issue, le poète accepte avec courage d'aller toujours de l'avant, de continuer à vivre:

"J'avancerai douloureux dans l'homme que je deviens . . ."
 "Je sais que je poursuivrai l'entreprise dérisoire . . ."

"*Ma Vie*" & "*L'honneur de Vivre*", André Frénaud.

Et c'est surtout par ce point d'honneur que la poète met à vivre que se manifeste le nouvel humanisme que la guerre n'a peut-être pas fait naître tout à fait puisqu'on en trouvait déjà le germe dans les premières poésies de Frénaud qui datent de 1938, mais du moins qu'elle a confirmé et qu'elle s'est chargée de révéler à d'autres poètes moins évolués que Frénaud. De plus, cet "Honneur de Vivre" est bien dans la tradition française qui va de Montaigne jusqu'à Anatole France.

Mais il plane sur la poésie qui se dégage de cet humanisme un désespoir latent qui, loin de s'exprimer par de fulgurantes échappées lyriques, se contente de noyer dans la suie les plus riches trésors de la vie. Il ne reste plus la moindre trace de l'illusion romantique. Sur toutes les portes de sortie vers lesquelles l'homme se sent instinctivement attiré, le poète s'empresse de coller l'étiquette "FACTICE", car en aucun cas il considère qu'il a le droit de tromper. Le temps de l'espérance en des valeurs magiques est révolu. Il faut que l'homme apprenne à vivre, les yeux ouverts, sans espoir, pour la seule gloire de prendre ses responsabilités envers ses semblables, pour remplir sans tricher les devoirs que lui impose le simple fait d'exister. Philosophie héroïque s'il en fut qui, se mettant toutes les inerties hostiles de la vie contre elle, atteint tout de même à la grandeur.

Il n'est pas étonnant alors qu'une impression de médiocrité, de pauvreté volontaire se dégage de certains poèmes modernes, témoins ces quelques vers d'André Frénaud, extraits des "Mystères de Paris":

". . . Chaque matin les tapis jusqu'à dix heures
 "Chaque matin le mauvais sang jusqu'à la fin de la vie . . .
 ". . . Le camelot brinqueballe sa bimboloterie
 "de la barrière de Pantin à la Grande-Ourse
 "Les petits marchands nourrissent les quatre saisons
 "Dans les entresols les riches
 . . . "font l'amour à la sauvette . . ."

Ainsi la lucidité, dans un dernier sursaut, a pris le pas sur les sens, source tarie de trop adorables fantômes. L'esprit a enfin fait jaillir la lumière et l'homme n'a plus le droit de s'abuser, maintenant, il voit. Et il peut réaliser que sa prison n'a pas de porte comme il l'avait espérer dans l'obscurité, que ses quatre murs l'enferment pour la vie et qu'il ne peut pas les faire reculer.

Ce principe étant posé sur le plan de l'esprit, le poète peut se permettre, sans être en contradiction avec lui-même, de donner libre cours à sa vocation. Le cas personnel d'André Frénaud est significatif et rassurant à ce sujet. Très jeune il

se sentait attiré par la poésie, mais son nihilisme philosophique lui interdisait de satisfaire ce désir naturel puisqu'il lui en faisait découvrir du même coup la complète inutilité. C'est alors qu'il a dépassé la rigueur de ses principes en trouvant le seul compromis possible entre la glaciale logique de l'esprit et les naturelles aspirations de l'homme: vivre la vie malgré tout et la vivre en en retirant le maximum de satisfactions.

"La plus folle aura ma vie
 "Nous la boirons en chantant
 "sur les fleuves à l'air du soir
 "Celles d'avant n'avaient pas su

"Le désert en hurlant passe
 "je veux oublier ma patrie
 "l'amour est un poison bavard
 "tes seins dans mes yeux qu'importe
 "je vois monter l'onde et me livre."

—*"La plus Folle", André Frénaud.*

Dès lors toutes les satisfactions les plus élémentaires sont permises à l'homme d'autant plus qu'elles sont les preuves les plus tangibles et les garants les plus surs de l'acceptation de la vie telle qu'elle est. Le poète moderne est donc enfin sorti du labyrinthe où le surréalisme l'avait conduit, et, à ce point de vue, l'expérience de Frénaud est particulièrement déterminante.

S'il apparaît aujourd'hui qu'il est encore possible d'écrire, il est un autre problème qui se pose maintenant et qui n'est pas pour autant résolu, c'est celui de l'expression.

Après la tentative surréaliste de l'écriture automatique dont les défauts ont été reconnus dès avant la guerre, le problème qui se pose au poète est de parvenir à la dépasser sans la renier. Tous les efforts tentent à décanter l'expression surréaliste pour la débarrasser de ses innombrables scories tout en lui conservant sa hardiesse dans l'image et sa spontanéité. Toutes les œuvres des jeunes poètes de notre nouvelle génération sont autant d'étapes dont la plupart aboutissent à une réussite dans cette entreprise salutaire. Si certains poètes comme Jean Lescure semblent pour l'instant s'en tenir à l'expression formelle qui a l'avantage de s'adapter plus parfaitement à la nature de leur émotion poétique, ce n'est pas sans poursuivre une recherche du langage adéquat dont le seul résultat est de rendre l'expression plus juste et plus pure.

". . . Ouverte à des torrents d'oiseaux
 "souveraine des horizons
 "la nappe étale ses mains calmes
 "cerne l'espace de la faim
 "resserre les liens du ciel
 "un buisson de nuit y fleurit
 "offre la neige à la chaleur
 "suscite une étendue nouvelle
 "blesse de blanc les yeux aveugles

"l'eau de l'hiver arme les pierres . . ."

Extraits d' "Une Anatomie du Secret", de Jean Lescure.

Il semble que l'expression poétique monte à l'esprit de Jean Lescure avec la transparence des vagues qui s'éteignent sur les sables. Comme elles, elle comporte

le même mystère, le même pouvoir de suggestion. C'est vraiment de la poésie à l'état pur, sans le moindre crapeau, car elle est jaillie d'on ne sait où pour se poursuivre on ne sait où, laissant seulement sur la page étonnée son énivrant parfum d'humidité. Certes, Jean Lescure n'échappe pas à l'influence du sur-réalisme, mais il sait la rendre moins tyrannique et l'assouplir au gré de son émotion.

" . . . Entre l'ombre et la lumière

"entre la bouche et le sourire

"entre la main et le plaisir

"entre le pain et le vin

"entre le soir et le matin

"entre tes yeux qui me voient seul

"la place est assez grande

"pour que j'aie peur . . ."

Extraits d' "Une Anatomie du Secret," de Jean Lescure.

De même que chez Lescure, il semble que chez André Frénaud, ce soit l'impressionisme qui soit à la base de la construction poétique. Impressionisme qui a l'avantage de conférer au poème une unité d'émotion à la place de l'habituelle et classique unité de pensée dont la rigueur peut nuire à l'expression poétique et qui lui permet de se développer "selon l'unité de ton d'une impression initiale".

"Dans la rue Vivienne le vampire s'approche de l'adolescent

"qu'il aborde sous le porche de l'hôtel de Beaujolais

"A minuit la Bourse gloutonne encore son sang

"La cloche effare dans l'herbe de ses rêveries

"la femme au centre creux

"L'eau souterraine glisse dans l'épais des deux rives

"Tu t'égaies en passant par ton ciel irisé

"et clignes dans le printemps des vaisseaux de la Seine

"De la Demi-Lune de Belleville au Point-du-Jour

"du pain blanc fait trempette dans tous les urinoirs

"nos coeurs ne sont pas moins fidèles éponges

"pour se gorger dans ton remugle Paris . . ."

—Extraits des "Mystères de Paris," de Frénaud.

Cependant, dans les oeuvres d'un autre jeune poète, chez Loys Masson, il existe une autre forme d'expression sur laquelle on nous permettra de spéculer car elle nous semble être particulièrement intéressante pour l'avenir.

"Mots, il est temps que vous dardiez du silence se faisant vivant comme une main

"Mots aimés de ma patrie, Equité, Charité;

"Mon poème n'est pas cet amas stellaire, ce bitume refroidi où dorment des légendes

"C'est un immenses coeur battant sur les pierres meurtries

"réveillant les dévastations, pompant les mille tendresses de l'air

"pour la graine enfouie sous la cendre et les grelons.

"Mots de mon poème, mon poème vous a fait de chair et de sang . . ."

—Extraits de "l'Automne," de Loys Masson.

Cette généreuse poésie, toute gonflée de vie, dépasse la cadre restreint de l'individu pour tendre vers une expression matérielle de la collectivité humaine. Comme dans une symphonie musicale, les thèmes se dévident de leurs torsades,

disparaissent puis réapparaissent pour, à la fin du poème, donner l'impression de se fondre et de s'élever jusqu'à hauteur cosmique. Ainsi, grâce à la densité de l'expression et à la largeur du souffle poétique, la poésie de Loys Masson rassemble-t-elle dans ses amples draperies toute la vie de la terre. D'ailleurs les mots eux-mêmes semblent être jaillis de quelque caverne profonde où s'opère la synthèse de la nature toute entière. Les images se heurtent et s'écrasent avec la force des éléments, elles dépassent le poème et donnent l'impression de s'élever en relief au-dessus de la phrase elle-même.

"Que l'automne maintenant pénètre chaque fibre de mon poème

"Qu'il roule sur ses bords ses soleils couchants, qu'il me lave et m'impregne

"de cette victoire qui flue des nuages à larges gouttes—

"Que l'automne soit un bouclier gris, une hache que les héros brandiront

"Qu'il donne aux arbres défaits des cuirasses de brume et que la brume sur chaque tronc active

"les bourgeons du prochain printemps . . ."

—*Extraits de "l'Automne," de Loys Masson.*

Installée dans un nouvel humanisme de la vie telle que nous sommes obligés de la concevoir après vingt années de paix ratée et six ans de guerre, libérée des servitudes que lui imposait sa soumission au surréalisme, assouplie dans sa technique, riche, en promesses, la poésie est toujours vivante en France à une époque où bien des valeurs sont mortes.

Jeunesse Artistique de France, Paris.

PAUL BORDRY.

La Jeunesse Artistique de France, 60 Boulevard Saint Germain, Paris 5°, France, serait désireuse de se mettre en relation directe, par voie postale, avec de jeunes écrivains anglais (poètes et prosateurs). En effet, Mr. Paul Bordry, directeur de la Jeunesse Artistique de France, prépare pour le compte de la Radiodiffusion Française une émission "Carrefour Littéraire" qui traite des rapports existant entre la littérature contemporaine française et anglaise. Les jeunes écrivains, même totalement inconnus, que cette offre intéresserait, sont priés de signaler leurs noms et leurs adresses au siège de la Jeunesse Artistique de France et de joindre à leurs lettres une note auto-biographique, des extraits de leurs oeuvres (poèmes et nouvelles) ainsi que quelques renseignements sur leurs conceptions littéraires. Par la suite il peut y avoir des possibilités de diffusion en France.

Sandhills

RAGWORT and Golden Rod
 Fire from this sullen sod:
 Flaming upon the sand
 Lighting this no-man's-land,
 Gilding this wilderness,
 Tomb-like in loneliness;
 Buried in sand and rush
 Rising, a burning bush:
 Ragwort and Golden Rod
 Fire from this sullen sod,
 Blaze me that trail untrod
 To the white hearth of God.

D. M. Holt.

Lawrence Durrell : A Clever Magician

LAWRENCE DURRELL presents the case of a poet who was practically unknown at the beginning of the war, and yet who made a considerable name during the war, this without either being a "war poet", writing about the war, or even setting foot in England. He belongs to no literary movement, appears to have no poetic "ancestors" or at any rate no English ones, he dislikes publicity, whenever possible he lives on islands. He is at present living on the island of Rhodes as British Information Officer for the Dodecanese.

Obviously he is a clear example of a poet who has got by on quality. Yet the beginnings are interesting. In the early thirties he was in London publishing small pamphlets of highly stylized, traditional, poems, some under his own name and others under invented pseudonyms. He was a friend of John Gawsworth and of Tambimuttu. He published "Panic Springs" under the name of Charles Norden, as well as at least two other novels. In Paris he founded and edited a literary magazine called "The Booster" but later changed it to "Delta". And in June 1938 his friend Henry Miller published his "Black Book" in Paris as the first volume of the Villa Seurat series. He was in Greece with Miller just before the war, a period described in the latter's "Colossus of Maroussi". And he stayed on until after the fall of Crete when he and his wife, Nancy, were evacuated on a troopship to Egypt. Their child, Berengaria Penelope, was the youngest evacuee.

It was in Cairo in 1941 that I first met him, in the house of Herbert Howarth. He had published a poem, "In Arcadia" in my magazine "Kingdom Come" and I was able to lend him a complete set of the magazine. I remember his being amused at a description by G. S. Fraser of the face of Henry Miller in "Fragments from Paris." ("I should have expected a battered, purple, swollen face, with the foam paddled over it, water runnelling down the sides of the nose, and the cheeks blown wide with wind. I should have expected all this, but I did not; and I was frightened by the bald, ravaged, the terribly and at all points *vulnerable* face I saw.") He also made a copy of his "In Arcadia," which he republished in a revised version in "A Private Country."

I did not meet him often; for when I was permanently stationed in Cairo he was in Alexandria. Once I met him at lunch in the Anglo-Egyptian Union with the Dr. Stephanides (then a Captain in the R.A.M.C.) of "Prospero's Cell." We spent the afternoon in the Zamalek Aquarium, Durrell all the time attacking the Apocalypse Movement which was then in full swing in England. "In a few years the best of these poets will regret their association with the Apocalypse," he prophesied, "but they will never be able to live it down. They are marked for life." (It is interesting to note that to-day both Nicholas Moore, and G. S. Fraser have left the movement but are still regarded as Apocalyptic poets). I remember referring to the Apocalyptic Anthology "The White Horseman" and we all laughed at the joke: "*Perhaps only a rocking horseman after all!*" He was also bitter against the idea of "war poets." "I think all this war-poet stuff is bogus and vulgar really," he once wrote to me, "the only kind of work worth while is work that wears no uniform but its own merits—and dressing prose or poetry in pips and crowns is from my point of view a bad show. . . ."

In appearance Durrell does not look like a poet. He does not look a romantic, nor a bohemian, nor even a Grecian. He does not look like an intellectual at all but rather like a typical example of the British official classes abroad, but with a touch of something else—a skill in gambling say or in the manipulation of stocks and shares, in neither of which he has actually the least interest. G. S.

Fraser describes him:

"I shall
Remember Larry stocky against a bar,
The round face and the tartan scarf, looking
Like a jovial commercial traveller. . . ."

But he talks brilliantly and diffusedly on almost any subject and once invented a psycho-analytical questionnaire by which he hoped to probe the inner lives of all the writers of our time.

His first significant work is "The Black Book," It is unfortunate that its sheer obscenity (I use this word in its bourgeois sense) stands in the way of its being published in England, for there is in it plenty to justify T. S. Eliot's statement that "The Black Book" contains some of the finest English prose written since the 1914-18 war. It is a book that could have a profound influence on modern English prose writing and I would recommend it to any writer who having reached and lost his way in the technique of Joyce is looking for a way out. It paints with extraordinary truth a way of life, as common to Bloomsbury or Montmartre as to a third rate Greek hotel before the war, which in a sense it attacks. Someday there will have to be a great struggle over the publication of this book in England. (Already I hear that a U.S.A. publisher is planning an unexpurgated edition). But such a book cannot be cut by puritan hands without irretrievably harming it. It contains on page 140 Durrell's renunciation of England as a country to live in, a passage that will give some idea of the book's style:

"You were offering me, in your oblique way, the whole of England—the masques, the viols, the swans, the mists, the doom, the fogs: you were offering me a mediaeval death in which I could live forever, stifled in the pollen of breviaries, noctuaries, bestiaries: split silk and tumbrils, aesthetic horses and ruined Abbeys. The lament for Dido opening up such pits of emotion in my brain that I fell upon my knees and shattered in little pieces in the hearth. The forest opening its eyes of frost, the unborn morning of the world, the dew in a sheet, the trees stifled in feathers. The great orchestra hymning gruffly among its ants, gathering and breaking in time to the sea. The hot lick of the winter rain, blinding us all from coast to shabby coast. Or Pat going quietly mad among the sprained spires of Oxford. Your room, with the gramophone like a broken womb emptying Beethoven over us. This is the world which was implicit in our extravagant gust, our laughter, our tears, our poems. That is why, when I tell you I have rejected it, I want you to understand clearly the terms of that rejection. That is an England I am going to kill, because by giving it a quietus once and for all, *I can revive it!* This is not a flashy paradox, but something I have experienced, something that I have suffered."

The book "Prospero's Cell," (Faber) taken from diaries written about the same time as "The Black Book", but revised in Alexandria several years later is quieter in style, though there is the same fluid sense of beauty and perfection of image. A guide book about Corfu written in the form of a personal narrative, it is also the account of Durrell's life on the island with four familiars, Dr. Theodore Stephanides, Zarian, the Count D, and Max Nimiec. Their characters are made to merge into the setting until they become almost inconspicuous or else the legs on which to hang anecdotes. The descriptions, as of "Vintage Time" or of "Karaghiosis: the Laic Hero" are simple but flushed, like green leaves or fruit or coloured flowers on white marble. In all this book Durrell has found a style whose flavour tastes of Greece, a calm quiet style with its own power and sureness.

As a poet a friend of mine once described Lawrence Durrell with the word: "A Magician." I would agree with the use of this word but I would also modify it by adding the adjective "clever." For apart from its magical quality there is also—and sometimes unfortunately—about much of Durrell's poetry a cleverness that detracts from its sureness. In his first book, "A Private Country" the sure magic beauty of a poem like "Nemea" or the good humour and skill of "A Ballad to the Good Lord Nelson" or the interest of "Fangbrand" are lost when in a long grotesque piece like "The Death of General Uncebunke" with its fourteen carols and five soliloquies a kind of humorous elf gets into Durrell and he perpetuates what amounts to a gigantic practical joke.

"My uncle has entered his soliloquy.
The candles shed their fur.
O world be nobler for her sake
The boys hang in the vestry, the days
Are drawing in. Blow out the flesh,
The three-score ten of candles,
This squalid birthday-cake,
Give us to God with slim and shining handles."

All this is amusing, but it just goes on for too long, or else it happens too often. Durrell is as much attracted and led astray by this kind of joking as Shakespeare was by punning. It is a pity.

Yet it is easy to see why the appearance of "A Private Country" in England in 1943 should have been received by the acclaim with which it was. Reviewers referred to it in such terms as "tantalising and exciting" . . . "range of esoteric scholarship, richly tasted on the imagination" . . . "over-bright satirical intellect" . . . "pregnant and provocative imagery" . . . and "he is a poet who has entered 'the dark crystal'." All this language, so different to the normal reviewers' clichés which have become meaningless show homage to a newness in poetry which was not imitative and which is scarcely imitable. Like Sidney Keyes, his complete opposite, the Latin poet against the Greek if you wish, Durrell is likely to found no school. (Indeed the best poetry of 1940 onwards may come to be known as that of brilliant individuals rather than of groups and tendencies.)

Typical of Durrell's effortless mastery in this species of new Grecian bizarre or calm are the following:

"Everywhere night lay spilled
Like coolness from spoons."
(*"Fangbrand."*)

"Agamemnon under tumulus serene
Outsmiles the jury of skeletons:
Cool under cumulus the lion queen."
(*"Nemea."*)

"Guilt can lie heavier than house of tortoise.
Winter and love, O desperate medicines. . . ."
(*"The Sonnet of Hamlet."*)

"Now small skills: the fingers laid upon
The nostrils of flutes, the speech of women
Whose tutors were the birds; who singing
Now civilised their children with the kiss."
(*"In Arcadia."*)

"Soon it will be spring. Out of
This huge magazine of flowers, the earth,

We will enchant the house with roses,
 The girls with flowers in their teeth,
 The olives full of charm: and all of it
 Given: can one say that
 Any response is enough for those
 Who have a woman, an island and a tree?"

("Letter to Seferis the Greek.")

The poems from which these quotations are taken are all *complete* poems; they seem not to show the possibility of any change or advance. In what to the general public was taken as his first book Durrell stood out as a poet of extraordinary resource and maturity.

Yet his second book, "Cities, Plains, and People" interests me more. There is less of the joking and the purposeless obscurity which this involves—indeed when Durrell is being merry in this book he does it brilliantly, as in "Poggio" or "Mythology." This last I should like to quote in full as showing the freedom and mastery which Durrell displays when at his best.

"All my favourite characters have been
 Out of all pattern and proportion:
 Some living in villas by railways,
 Some like Katsimbalis heard but seldom seen,
 And others in banks whose sunless hands
 Moved like great rats on ledgers.

Tibble, Gondril, Purvis, the Duke of Puke,
 Shatterblossom and Dude Bowdler
 Who swelled up in Jaffa and became a tree:
 Hollis who had wives killed under him like horses
 And that man of destiny.

Ramon de Something who gave lectures
 From an elephant; founded a society
 To protect the inanimate against cruelty.
 He gave asylum to aged chairs in his home,
 Lampposts and crockery, everything that
 Seemed to him suffering he took in
 Without mockery.

The poetry was in the pity. No judgment
 Disturbs people like these in their frames
 O men of the Marmion class, sons of the free."

In most of the poems of this book there is a similar tremendous certainty in technique, though the long title poem; "Cities Plains and People" appears to me in places lifeless and for that reason a Durrell failure, lacking sparkle. It has good passages but I do not see it as a whole; it is far less of a whole even than "Uncebunke" and it is difficult to see what connection the notes at the side have with the text (though this is not always the case). At the most they can be no more than personal notes or scribbles on the ledger and for the general reader therefore confuse unnecessarily.

Instances in this book of Durrell's complete control over his poetry, like a man

with a whip lashing fearlessly at lions, are in "Pressmarked Urgent" where he writes his poems in cablese, and in the "Two poems in Basic English." Anybody it is true, could do tricks like these, but the result would not in many cases result in pieces so good.

A new symptom too in this second book is Durrell's spirit of enquiry. Just as in "Coptic Poem" he poses the problem of the vanishing of a group of people, so in poems like "La Rochefoucauld," "Byron," and "Fabre" he sets out to explain why others have *arrived*. This set of poems shows considerable acuteness, even though one may be in disagreement with the conclusions as somehow slightly wicked, as if a naughty perverse child prodigy was undertaking these examinations. "La Rochefoucauld" for instance begins:

"A penny for your thoughts. I wasn't joking."

Most of it I learned from serving girls. . . ."

And "Fabre" cannot get past without the sly dig: "If real women were like moths he didn't notice." Similarly the conclusion on Horace (*On First looking into Loeb's Horace*), skilfully led up to, is:

"Fat, human and unloved,
And held from loving by a sort of wall,
Laid down his books and lovers one by one,
Indifference and success had crowned them all."

All these are poems for which I would use the word "agreeable" rather than any other. They are to be enjoyed in the full way in which one enjoys good food and wine. They are poems to be savoured.

In a more lyric style Durrell displays his cleverness and sure magic in such poems as "Visitations":

"Eyes and thoughts and lovely bodies,
David's singing, Daphne's wit
Like Eve's apple undigested
Rot within us bit by bit."

or in "Water Music" beginning:

"Wrap your sulky beauty up
From sea-fever, from winterfall. . . ."

But best perhaps in this style is "Alexandria" which I have admired and remembered since first seeing it in the Middle East monthly "Citadel," early in 1943. It opens with magnificent grace:

"To the lucky now who have lovers or friends,
Who move to their sweet undiscovered ends,
Or whom the great conspiracy deceives,
I wish these whirling autumn leaves. . . ."

As with so many descriptions of cities essentially Greek in their way of local life the mood is caught by memories of people rather than of streets, houses, or squares.

"B. with his respect for the Object, and D.
Searching in sex like a great pantry for jars
Marked "Plum and apple;" and the small, fell
Figure of Dorian ringing like a muffin bell—"

And it ends too upon a clear, soft, but precisely strong note.

"So we, learning to suffer and not condemn
Can only wish you this great pure wind
Condemned by Greece, and turning like a helm
Inland where it smokes the fires of men,

Spins weathercocks on farms or catches
 The lovers at their quarrel in the sheets;
 Or like a walker in the darkness might,
 Knocks and disturbs the artist at his papers
 Up there alone, upon the alps of night."

I feel always in reading Lawrence Durrell that he is a poet absolutely sure of himself, as in these lines, and I feel this same sense of sureness even when—as in other lines—he does not so apparently succeed. He is a clever magician whose spells nearly always captivate, but even when they do not he does not notice it himself. His cleverness can blind him to what has not come out correctly.

Self-condemned to a permanent exile from England, who can say whether ultimately this may or may not prove beneficial? The Greek poet Cavafy profited by living in Egypt, albeit in the Greek city of Alexandria. So perhaps may Durrell profit by living abroad in an official circle which is more English than he thinks. And despite the very obvious Greek influence on Durrell's work, there is most prominent in it a roguish quality and a strength that is certainly English. Both Greek and English writers have remarked to me that whenever Durrell translates from the Greek, as in his "Six Poems from the Greek of Sekilianos and Seferis" he invariably produces poems which read like poems by Lawrence Durrell. This is not an entirely fair statement, but there is a degree of truth in it, which shows Durrell not to be so lost in the Greek landscape as may be imagined. His own personality—and much of it is an English personality though he may not realize it—will always predominate.

"For Prospero remains the evergreen
 Cell by the margin of the sea and land,
 Who many cities, plains, and people saw
 Yet by his open door
 In sunlight fell asleep
 One summer with the Apple in his hand."

Which reminds me that when early in 1945 I told the Greek poet and editor, Katsimbalis (c.f. "Mythology") that Durrell had gone to Rhodes he said: "That is just like Larry, always wanting to be a King of Islands." The solitary, the legend of Prospero, the deserted temple, the quiet beautiful place with a few friends, are always what draw him away from his contemporary writers like the music in "Mary Rose." And this separateness is the material of his magic if not his dexterity.

JOHN WALLER.

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- "Cities, Plains, and People." (Faber). 6/-.
- "Prospero's Cell." (Faber). 10/6.
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Present hampering production conditions have not prevented the issue of a handsome new edition of Peter Quennell's "Aspects of Seventeenth Century Verse" (Home and Van Thal, 10s. 6d.), which we welcomed fourteen years ago, an arresting selection of the lyrical, metaphysical and devotional poetry, each with a judicious foreword, of a very diversified and diffused period, an exquisite essay in exhumation and embalming.

When The Sword Has Struck★

Duologue (Two Voices in One Mind)

- 1st Voice: It's a fine world!
A fine world for bees and butterflies,
For trees and flowers,
A fine world for birds—
- 2nd Voice: Yes, when no one pulls off the butterflies' wings,
Or stifles them in bottles,
When trees are not cut down,
Flowers tramples underfoot,
Birds cramped in cages:
- 1st V: It's a fine world for lakes, seas and rivers—
- 2nd V: When their waters are not polluted, poisoned,
Choked with wrecked ships and the bodies of drowned men:
- 1st V: It's a fine world for fields and mountains—
- 2nd V: When their garments are not soaked with blood,
Their green skin scorched by fire and smoke.
It's a fine world for thieves and vagabonds,
For all who hold themselves apart, and *don't care*,
For tyrants who enslave, brutes who chastise,
Fiends who trap, exploit and torture—
A fine world for *them!*
- 1st V: It was a fine world in the Beginning:
A Holy Mountain wherein none might hurt and none destroy,
A world of radiant friendliness and quiet humour,
Gracious and sunlit, a place for happy growth:
Where the Living Soul of man awoke,
Became aware,
Felt the pure life-spark quickening within,
And knew the nearness of divinity.
- 2nd V: It was a fine world! So thought the Rebels,
The Evil-Bringers, when they set foot upon it,
And strained their wills against the Will of Godhead;
When they lied and boasted, twisting the Heavenly Plan
To false, distorted patterns.
"A fine world for us", they cried,
"And it shall be our world, our plaything,
Used for our glory, and to pleasure us alone!"
So they wrought subtly, led by that Great Serpent
Who forsook the Heights,
Whose keen mentality gave birth
To every dark design of degradation;
While God allowed his world to be defiled—

His gay and verdant world! He, the Creator,
Calmly looked on and took no action!

- 1st V: There's the great obstacle, the puzzle of the ages,
 The stumbling-block, the universal crossword!
 Human brain seeks, toils, queries and despairs;
 Fails to resolve this problem, satisfy
 This need for understanding;
 Fails to explain the dark revolting story
 Of pain, fear, cruelty and violence,
 In which have suffered, not the perpetrators,
 But ever and forever, in the recurring cycles of world-agony,
 Their weak, defenceless victims—
 The young, the tender, the brave, the agéd, and the wise.
 Love scorned and beauty overthrown,
 Wisdom disdained and virtue made a mockery—
- 2nd V: O, it's a fine world for butterflies and birds
 When no one pulls off their wings or imprisons them in cages!
- 1st V: Yet reflect that God desired not slaves,
 But willing helpers; not automata
 Obeying his decrees because they could no other,
 But children gladly offering service
 To a loved Father. Free-will was his gift,
 And, once bestowed, was not to be withdrawn,
 Although perverted and abused.
- 2nd V: Why was that strange gift flung into the world,
 That dangerous, dynamic gift,
 Source only of sorrow, discord, misery?
- 1st V. Reflect again: because God willed not *slaves*.
 His wish was that the Dark Ones should return
 Freely to him; not driven with whips,
 Not scourged into submission, not as machines,
 Will-less and mindless.
- 2nd V: Hence his world, so fair in its beginnings,
 Became a playground for the dual fires—
 The one, creative, purifying, just:
 The other, merciless, destructive and obscene.
 Play of the Forces—Battle of the Wills—
 Great Game of Cosmic Energies—
 Volcanic Forge!
 And, beaten into shape upon that Anvil,
 Hurled to and fro in that relentless Contest,
 The souls of men, their hidden, secret selves!
- 1st V: Tortured, not broken;
 Crushed, to rise again;

WHEN THE SWORD HAS STRUCK

Down-trodden, desperate . . .
Yet still the human heart puts out fresh leaves,
Buds and unfolds, and gives birth to flowers of summer
That have no fear of the Sun.

2nd V: And shall that last destruction be achieved,
The Root of Evil be annihilated,
When men awake and know themselves God's helpers
In age-long war of Darkness and the Light?
Shall Earth, cleansed and renewed,
No longer breed corruption,
No longer lie beneath the Evil Heel,
Be Rebel-occupied no more?

1st V: O, question not! But let your iron be beaten into steel,
Your clay incandescent in the furnace!
Know yourself one with the Power that makes new,
Creates, builds and revivifies;
Welcome the pain, the nameless anguish,
Endure the fear, the deathly weakness, the unknown dread,
The long-drawn expectation, never fulfilled,
The deep, the piercing hope, ever unsatisfied:
For when the steel is tempered and refined.
Even to the uttermost limit,
Each molten drop shall be welded
Into the blade of the Great Sword
Swing in the Mighty Hand,
Forged into one immortal weapon,
Sign of the Balance and Absolute Justice,
Bringer of Victory supreme and final.

2nd V: So the Wheel turns, the Fire burns,
The sparks glow, white as light!
And it shall be a fine world again
Through all who fought and conquered
In the strength of the spirit, self-forgetting,
Whose names in the palimpsest of history still shine,
Who still rejoice,
Whether in body-limits or in hard-won freedom:

1st V: A fine world for all,
When the Sword, the peace-bringing Sword,
The Sword of Righteousness forged from the souls of men,
Has struck for the Healing of the Nations;
And, the bitter warfare ended, forever lies at rest,
Shining and glorious,
Sword of Light, Sword of Fulfilment,
Wand of the Conqueror,
At rest upon the Everlasting Shoulder:

Both Voices: When the fiery heart of the Earth

Grows sanctified, a calm, self-radiant shrine,
 And the stricken heart of man
 Breaks into flame—
 Flower of Flame, Chalice of Love!—
 When the Moon's tyranny no more prevails,
 And the impregnable Sun reigns in a sky redeemed:
 It will be a fine world then,
 A Garden of Delight wherein its children
 Move steadfastly toward their Sacred Goal.

Eva Martin.

*Au Sommet du Montagne**

"Le silence eternal de ces espaces infinis m'effraye":
Pascal, 'Pensees'.

THIS is the site of all the vacancies
 Which hang in dreams,
 And from these heights fall headlong
 All those who wake in nightmare.
 When he lighted on the earth's new surface
 So Satan might have felt on his space flight
 From Pandemonium

Or a moonman. He
 Would have known kinship with this upper world,
 Interregnum of no time,
 Shadowworld well recognized in sleep or traversed
 By the soul in her imaginings
 Of that passage from a body, known as death.
 In such a wilderness as this Prometheus
 Was chained. And when the cross carried
 A man and a man's agony, darkness
 Covered so the sun.

Here you are the globe's dictator.
 Indias are at your feet and all seas
 Surge into the mist's distance.
 Boundaries diminish. Nations, frontiers cease.
 The millenium is here: but not the men
 Who prayed its coming. For you are Adam,
 The one mortal. As yet within your mind
 Eve is only a desire half realised.
 Or the wheel's circle turned.
 You are the last survivor and are free
 To rebuild Eden.
 Your brain, too small, reels, bends
 Like an ashbough in the gale's trough.

In a platinum band of light
 And eagle swirls between mists, wings furled
 Like a faroff galleon. The peaks talk
 In the awful roar of nothingness

And the very height speaks. In the vacancy
Is murmuring and madness looms
Through the halflight.

The wind; it is the invisible wind.
No trees sway, no grasses dance;
Nothing to mark its presence save its speech.

The light lifts again.
Below the black face opposite
A gold thread hangs molten: the waterfall.
Gradually realisation pierces
The mind's mattress of unconsciousness,
Like the tired swimmer who has dared
The seafloor overlong and thrust himself up
Through the heavy water, slowly.

Limits are reimposed. The empty spaces fill.
The fear passes and the madness.

Lorna Westall.

Return[★]

I SEE they've ploughed the common up that you
And I remember flushed with flowers.
Nothing is changed but that. All that was ours
Still stands just as it used to do.

Here is the tree where we all used to swing
Up to a bluer sky than I've seen since.
The ground is dappled still with small footprints.
How strange I have remembered it as Spring!
Those wide green April fields, they are still there.
To right and left meander idle lanes
Down to the shallow ford, that too remains,
Where the unmoving cattle stand and stare.
Through strips of shade and sun
Much the same children run
To catch the fish they see . . .
As confident as we.

The ghosts close in upon me one by one.
With fingers to their lips they bid me stand
To hear the silence welling from the land,
The sigh of pigeon on the west wind borne,
The toss and tumble of the wooded hill.
Are you, of all that sure and careless throng
Who never dreamt that life could go so wrong,
Are you, I wonder, listening to it still?
Far off one lonely bell throws out a chime.
There is no message though, there comes no word . . .
Yet now I know that all the time
It was the drums you must have heard.

Cynthia Palmer.

Not Love, But Peace

I ALMOST think I could,
 If God were kind
Step from this window on to clouds that lie
So close that I could touch them,
 In a sky
Of deepest blue, and walk unheeded to that other sky
That somewhere shelters you,
And there to lie, a little while protected.

And watch your mouth turn up,
 With cheerful grin
When I walked in. As though the world
Held nothing easier than
 This journeying.

And we would talk, not of our love,
 But of the Peace,
Until the splendid silences would creep
 Over our souls,
And sighing awhile we turn away, to sleep. *Monica Roberts.*

Lament

Written in 1945 before end of War.

BLOSSOMS of golden springtime, will you bloom
Above us when we moulder in the tomb?
And you, bright, flaunting tulips, will you laugh
In gardens still, to be our epitaph?

We garlanded our pictures of the dead;
Who now will love and tend them in our stead?
At night our daughters sang; but who remains
To call to life those half-forgotten strains?

Will any come in reverence and pity
To mourn the ruins of each cherished city?
Who will record, in all the devastation,
The halting footsteps of a dying nation?

Woe to us all, we live and die in sorrow,
Destroyed today, forgotten by tomorrow.
And when the tumult of the fight is o'er,
The dead sleep sound, never to waken more.

Blossoms of golden springtime, you will bloom
Above us when we moulder in the tomb.
And you, bright, flaunting tulips, you will laugh
In gardens still, to be our epitaph.

Translated from the German of Kate Hinze by Frances Lobb.

Too Much Loveliness

BATHE my Spring wounds with swift, astrigent rain,
Swathe them in snowy folds of flowering cherry,
Then kill that bird who stabs and stabs again
With knife-edged song to bid my heart be merry.

He bids my heart be merry! How can I,
Tortured and tired with too much loveliness,
Give laughter back to Springtime's laughing sky
When heart holds only grief and emptiness?

Each cruel birdnote tears those wounds apart
Where spearhead chestnut blossoms thrust and turned
Deeper and deeper in my anguished heart;
My hands with white-hot primroses are burned.

So will I seek revenge for every scar,
Redress for all unhealing Springtime ills—
And with a steely, seven-bladed star
Strip screaming petals from the daffodils!

Myfanwy Haycock.

I Know the Shrine

I KNOW the shrine.
We will go there now, my love,
To-night the moon has washed the hill-line clear.
The meadow-flowers have everywhere
Entwined the moonlight with their scent.
And all is hushed . . .

So put your soft hand in mine,
As you have always done,
Through all the ages while we were together,
Before the earth was, we are, my love.

It is time now
To go to the shrine
In the valley over the hills.

That steadfast gleam is the elemental torch
That shines on the pool of moon-dew crystalline
In the inmost sanctuary of the shrine.
We will stand by the pool and wait, my love.
The whitish haze
Will disperse and reveal the depthless transparency.

We will gaze and gaze
Until we see it blaze,
Our Eternal Fire.

Hong Kong.

Ku-pi.

Harebells on the Downs

WHERE is that voice whereto I'll trust
The things I dare not say, but must?
What tongue shall venture to impart
The fullness of a lover's heart?

Not words; for words misuse the sense;
E'en poesy lacks eloquence:
Nor music; song tells not the whole
Of melody within the soul:
To silence? No; itself were broken
Or else its burden left unspoken:
Perchance to flowers; Beauty pleading,
Where is the heart will prove unheeding?
But earth bears not, for all her roses,
The rose that in the heart reposes.
Blossoms, music, words may speak ——
Not with the voice I still must seek;
One tongue must serve for all of these,
And blend their several qualities.

My voice shall be a voice of air—
The wind shall be my courier; there
I'll launch my dearest mysteries:
My love shall hear me in the breeze
That bears all music in its motion,
Spirit of earth, and breath of ocean,
Rich in all sound; to silence not unknown;
The eternal wind, that flows, will flow, has flown
Ever anew the changeless uplands over;
The secret wind, caressing every lover;
The sighing wind, that sweeps the crowns
And stirs the harebells on the downs.

Frank W. Reed.

Shadow and Sun

SHALL I forget it? No, not anywhere . . .
See, here on emptiness I sketch your face—
Grave eyes in sunken sockets, honey hair
Spilling with dreams from a steep forehead; trace
Once more your image on this heavy air:
Limn yet again the legend of your grace,
Girl against April . . . the wild iris there . . .
And dew and sunlight and a morning's space.

For now at Chamonix behind you rears
Grey glacial rock, and your grey eyes I see
Gauging new depths till distance disappears—
O memory! past loveliness and tears
Into that chasm dark as death might be—
All Carolina springtime lost in years.

Margaret Beaufort.

The Love Lyric Competition

THOSE who enter for a poetry competition should be more modest. It is lacking in courtesy to The Poetry Society and the Adjudicating Committee to send in verses so shallow in substance and trite in terms of expression that no magazine would allow them the light of day. The Committee responsible for finding the best poem out of hundreds of entries look for genuine feeling, which cannot be simulated, original treatment in theme or expression, or at least an unusual mastery of words. 80% of the entries sent in for the present competition showed no sign of these qualities, as the writers, if they were genuine and conscientious craftsmen, could see for themselves. Why not then put far more *work* into the poem before submitting it? Inspiration cannot be commanded, but hard work can, and metre, rhythm and rhyme can at least be used to create sound verse, even if such verse fails to rise to the level of poetry.

The theme—A Love Lyric—lends itself to an infinite variety of forms, and although the word Lyric had once a clearcut meaning of its own, with the suggestion about if of a song, yet the verse forms here have ranged from the epigram, through the clear-cut mould of the sonnet to the loosest wording of *vers libre*. Indeed, the poems submitted were as various as their origin, and even New Zealand and Australia were well represented.

All who have sent in verses, even from the ends of the world, at least began by choosing their best, unlike a well-known writer from New York who sent in two enormous packets of poems, few of which were even Love Lyrics. She had no time to make a selection, nor had we.

There were many genuine attempts to avoid the obvious. From the Hiawatha rhythm to Alexandrines, all forms were to be found in the 20% of the entries alone worth reading. Sheila Fayre's "I sent my Love", rhyming the second and fourth lines of a five-line verse, was most interesting; but though Eveline Atkinson's "Any Wife" was powerful free verse, it would have been stronger still, in our opinion, in the blinkers of a clear-cut form, and Miss L. de Wet, beginning well in her poem "No Other", falls flat on her face in the second verse, which is, to our thinking, just plain prose.

There were lovely phrases, lighting at times an otherwise unimpressive poem. Clive Howson opened splendidly in "To my Love":

"O, when the hanging gardens of your hair
Suffer the white inevitable snows,
When sadly your wan, puckered lips declare
Their crimson lineage from the swelling rose",

and James Brocking has something of the old, romantic manner when he declares in the second verse of "Nocturne":

"My love is secret as the wind that stirs
The midnight splendour of the folded rose."

Nor is imagination wanting, and Frank Reed, with his "Harebells on the Downs", and Kathleen Mason's "I am all Things" show plenty of it.

But many a good poem was spoilt by carelessness in the detail of technique. There was too much lazy rhyming. "Dawning" and "mourning" do not rhyme, Mrs. Mason, "not nohow"! And there was too much lazy scansion. Alfred Uhlen's "The Road" would be a lovely poem if he would decide on a verse form and keep to it. As it stands it is neither free verse, which depends on rhythm, nor set verses in a pre-decided form, and his last line with its eleven syllables fits in nowhere. Several other poems were nearly very good, as B. R. Gibbs' "Love

Song", and A. M. Stokes' "Serenade". A little more "lift" and a little more polish of phrasing would have made of the latter a memorable poem, none the less so for its clinging closely to the skirts of Shakespeare.

And so to the few. None was quite outstanding, and we have divided the prize into first, second and third, with a few Highly Commended and a few Commended to follow, the latter admittedly chosen from many deserving at least this recognition of their work.

With little hesitation we have given the first prize to Mrs. Muriel Spark, of London, for "The Robe and the Song". It has an air about it. It is complete in design, form and texture. "Hesitant", perhaps, in the last line but two, might have been strengthened, but it is a lovely poem as it stands.

"Vale", by Mrs. Celia Randall, of County Down, is second. There is something here of the cold intensity of grief. Third is "Waiting", by Miss Christine Rydon, of Glamorganshire. This is a song, though a sad one, and has the quality of "Reach", of deliberate hyberbole to express some strong emotion. The Highly Commended runners-up were close on the ladies' heels. "Serenade", by A. M. Stokes, has already been referred to, and Norah Gibbs' "The Moment" would have been among the winners but for a terrible last line but one. "In rapture still shall glimpse our dream" lets down the whole of the poem. "Rapture" and "glimpse" should be warned off the poetic turf and, harnessed together in one verse and followed by "dream" rhyming with "gleam"—no, Mrs. Gibbs, "not nohow"! Frank Reed's "Harebells on the Downs" is good, for it works up the intensity of feeling with the simplest of forms, rhymed eight-syllable couplets. Finally, "Sorrow, that Lonely One", by James Steel, of County Durham, with this phrase as a refrain, has a heart-rending quality which would have placed it in the winning three had more care been given to polishing the metre. As already pointed out, if the poem is in verse, the form of verse must be settled and maintained.

Here, then, is the list. For next year, please let us have more depth of thought and feeling, and in the actual working out of the poem, just MORE HARD WORK.

1ST PRIZE: Muriel Spark, London.

2ND PRIZE: Celia Randall, County Down.

3RD PRIZE: Christine Rydon, Glamorganshire.

Highly Commended :

A. M. Stokes, Linby, Notts.
Frank Reed, Herts.
Norah Gibbs, Bideford.
James Steel, Durham.
S. J. Baggott, Horsham.

Commended :

T. E. Casson, Pennington.
Jean Shaw, Radcliffe-on-Trent.
Bertha Skeat, Sedbergh, Yorks.
J. L. Pritchard, Betchworth, Surrey.
G. E. J. Proudman, Stroud, Glos.

The Robe and the Song

NOW would I wear the robe of your embrace
And flaunt its splendour until youth be spent
Had I not borrowed Pride's habiliment
To seek within its folds a finer grace.

I would have listened to the song you made
To woo the beating pulse, the surging vein

LOVE LYRICS

Had not Resentment's dissonant refrain
Silenced the accents of your serenade.

Then set your measure to so bold a tune,
Weave your caresses in a cloak so proud
That never-song nor robe shall fairer be.
Hesitant lover, claim my favour soon
Lest Pride enfold me like a winding-shroud
And harsh Resentment sing my threnody.

Muriel Spark.

Vale

THE earth lies open to receive
What most I love. Her breath
Is spent. Here must I leave
Love's all to dust and death.

Farewell, what's best of good and sweet—
Your beauty dead—I stand
With flowers about my feet,
Earth falling from my hand.

Red lips and golden hair—these change
In life as death. Age brings
No hope. I turn to strange
Imperishable things.

Celia Randall.

Waiting

THE muffled trees are wrapped in shawls
Of woven shadow flecked with rain.
Time drags his foot along the road—
I wait for you to come again.

Grey world! And yet if you were here
The trees would tumble diamond dew.
We'd find the roads were mirror-wet
And I would dance on stars with you.

A moonbeam slides into a pool,
The stars are blinking back their tears,
My future is an endless hope
The present is a million fears.

It is not only I who wait,
Longing to hustle Time away.
You, too, know how the lonely night
Stretches to touch a lonely day.

Christine Rydon.

The Sisters

AS I was sitting in a wood,
A dark girl with a dark smile came
And in a low voice spoke my name.
And looked at me as no girl should
And said: My name is Love. Now see
The marvellous richness of my dress
And all my body's loveliness—
Come, seek life's dark delight with me.

Her warm hand led me through the wood,
And as I went, her silken gown
And scented tresses hanging down
Took from me every thought of good.

In the deep wood I saw a pool,
And by the pool a fair girl sat
With stillness to be wondered at:
The dark girl whispered: Come, you fool.

But then the fair girl turned to me,
And in her face was beauty far,
And from her eyes looked forth a star
Which drew my soul compellingly.

I ran, and hid my shameful head
Within her lap, and wept in fear
Of gentleness. And then—My dear,
My name is Love, she said.

S. J. Baggott.

The Moment

OUR loving shall be no less rare
For brittle beauty. Frail as glass,
It yet shall burn upon the air,
Triumphant—till our moment pass.

Fair with the loveliness of snow
On far white morning hills, alone;
Gay with the sudden, vivid glow
Of sunlight on a wave-washed stone.

Carved not in marble shall it be,
To last unchanged the long years through,
Yet shall it mock eternity,—
This flame that turns my soul to you!

When years have long outworn the gleam
Of love for others, we, afar,
In rapture still shall glimpse our dream,—
A brilliant and unfading star!

Norah M. Gibbs.

Sorrow that Lonely One

WHEN at last I had outpoured for you
The fullness of my pent-up love,
Laid bare my pitiful small hoard for you
of childish treasure-trove,
This last gift also I gave to you—
Sorrow, that lonely one.

This body that I had kept strong for you,
This mind I had kept clean,
This heart that waited O so long for you,
The visions I had seen,
And this last gift also I gave to you—
Sorrow, that lonely one.

Meagre the harvest that is reaped for you
With so much pain.
No garner floor of life is heaped for you
With golden grain,
Save only this last gift I gave to you—
Sorrow, that lonely one.

James Steel.

Serenade

WHEREUNTO shall I liken thee? One Star
Is not more lovely than ten millions are,
That keep their favours for the night and shun
A beauty contest with the blushing Sun
Who melts the lily, to make red the rose
That, in her turn, is withered by the snows.
Abides thy loveliness; nor shade nor shine
Can dim the lustre of thine eyes, in mine.

A. M. Stokes.

The Choice

CHOOSE, if you will, the mossy gloom
Of lacing limbs whose shadowed leaves
Shut out the daylight's fierce commands:
Where no wind stirs the still, damp air,
And silenced is the world that grieves:
Choose, if you must, to bury there,
With trembling hands and fond caress,
The ripe seed of your consciousness.
And it will spring and come to bloom
In rare exotic flowers and cling
With tendrilled elegance entwined
About the tree whereon it feeds ;
The tree that points its gnarled fingers
Sunwards, takes the thunder, bleeds,
Is frost-enrined and tempest-hurled . . .
Yet sheds its splendour on the world.

J. T. Brockway.

*Spring In Salerno**

LIKE puffs of smoke the blossoms break
And green swords from their sheaths are drawn;
The roadside corpses cannot speak,
But babes are born,

Born to a new world, grieving past,
The sleeping seeds of precious fruit—
Of Peace . . . these pray that it shall last,
Though they be mute

In innocence. Salerno's beaches
Cried havoc once to khaki throngs;
Now once again the mother teaches
Her cradle songs . . .

Like puffs of smoke the buds unfold,
And, tired with sunshine, petals yawn:
There is no army that can hold
Back one Spring dawn.

Frederick Brundle.

*Coal**

DEEP in the fire's enchanting glow
I sink my shaft of thought, and find
A swarthy folk I dimly know,
Caught in the caverns of my mind.

A sound of laboured breathing stirs
The silence of that black abyss,
Where men, in self-hewn sepulchres,
Delve in the earth's metropolis.

Men whom I know but dimly—yet,
In these dark moments, it would seem
A myriad selves, articulate
People the burden of my dream.

I hear the rasp of hollow talk
Haunting that eerie, lamplit gloom,
And the dull thud of feet that walk
The long miles of their living tomb.

Echo of sunless laughter sounds
Like some cracked bell, tolling the dead,
And the incessant pick confounds
The ghosts which come with muffled tread.

Here, in a subterranean night,
I see—though long have I been blind!—
The incalculable worth of light
Wrung from the darkness men have mined.

Wilfred H. Bartlett.

From Horace to Herbert Read

AT a time when the bare ways and means of existence are matters of frantic concern for millions of our fellow-creatures, when the civilized world seems to have lost any semblance of a corporate soul, it is heartening to note the increasing attention paid to poetry and to the makers of poetry. The pillars of the world we know may be falling about us, but the invisible house of man's spirit grows and strengthens. Artists everywhere, poets, composers, painters and sculptors plan and build unremittingly, determined—if they could speak in unison—that man shall not live by bread alone, that beauty shall prosper and endure. Our concern in *The Poetry Review* is with Poetry. It is a specialist publication which goes out to the ends of the earth, bearing the testimony of the English-speaking people that the language of our race is the language of Shakespeare and Milton, a living entity constantly enriching itself from the sources of thought and imagination wherever they manifest themselves. For what does the Poet do, and for what does he stand? Let Wordsworth answer:

He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed: the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man.

Several important volumes in the present survey are devoted to translation and criticism of the works of poets of the past. One of the most eagerly awaited is Mr. John D. Sinclair's completion of his monumental prose version of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. *Book III, Paradiso* (The Bodley Head, 12s. 6d.) confirms the admiration that has been expressed for this great enterprise. Closely translated, phrase by phrase, with Dante's text at the left for comparison, the *Paradiso* will be welcomed by poetry-lovers, theologians, mediaevalists and Dante students alike. Mr. Sinclair has kept in mind the essentially autobiographical character of the whole work. "Fundamentally and obviously," he says, "all art is biography 'marked clearly with the internal stamp' and reporting of its maker; but this is peculiarly true of the art of Dante, not merely in its fictional form, but in its intimate spiritual veracity, in its passionate and convincing utterance of the deepest currents of his life, the pulse of his lines keeping time always with his heart. On these principles I have tried to read Dante with Dante continually in mind and to find the significance of every passage in its consonance with Dante's temper and outlook and experience." Mr. Sinclair's commentaries at the end of each canto will be found of immense assistance to the reader.

An earlier Latin, Quintus Horatius Flaccus, less seriously inclined than the sad-visaged Florentine, renews his two-thousand-year-old appeal to us in Lord Dunsany's translations of *The Odes of Horace* (Heinemann, 9s. 6d.). Lord Dunsany is famous for his delightfully fantastic imaginings in prose, and he is respected for his considerable output of verse. That he has abundantly enjoyed his Englishing of the Roman poet is clear from his very attractive Preface. He likens Horace to an oak that has weathered the ages, and the repeated translations to "leaves that last only a season or so and need continual renewal", and, varying the metaphor.

he suggests that "if generation after generation has translated Horace, it would seem that there is some continual need to look out on him thus through innumerable windows." We agree, but could have wished that Lord Dunsany in his translations had been a little less reverently 'poetic', that he had used more freely a light modern idiom such as Sir Edward Marsh approached so happily in his own translations published in 1941. Something a shade more colloquial is needed, we think, to catch the spirit and inflection of Horace. Yet, saying that, we are grateful to Lord Dunsany for a sound job well-finished.

We swing up through the centuries to Mr. W. P. Witcutt's *Blake, a Psychological Study* (Hollis & Carter, 8s. 6d.) and again find a book to welcome unreservedly, for here, to join the increasing body of Blakean literature, is an examination of the poet's work in the light of Jung's findings in psychology. Many readers find Blake's epics, with their Hebraic names and conscious intonations of prophecy, more than a little forbidding. They say, "We love Blake," but are content to restrict their knowledge of his written work to the "Songs of Innocence", where the mysticism is pellucid and tuneful. We have a sympathy with them, for Blake, the whole Blake, poet and prophet and engraver, is an endless field for exploration. Mr. Witcutt's object is "to indicate a path through the Blakean jungle" to the end that we shall "discover psychic patterns which are to be found within the soul of every man. The Blakean figures (altered indeed by the circumstances of each one's individuality) are to be found in all our dreams." He diagnoses Blake as an intuitive introvert and finds confirmation in his extreme imaginative originality which "constructed an entire philosophy of life almost without reference to any other mind," a dweller in an unrelated world of his own from which he conjured up pure symbols. In this he is unlike Wordsworth who found his symbol outside himself, to be absorbed and treated by unconscious thought.

Shelley's psychology was closely akin to Blake's. He too derived his power from an inner well-spring of pure symbolism. He had his own sanctions and, as was said of Blake, he was "a good man who also insisted on his right to be a wicked one" (Ellis), but while Shelley held by the classical symbols, in the long tradition of English poets, Blake rejected them. Shelley's mind in his first period, from childhood up to the year 1814, is discussed fully in Professor A. M. D. Hughes *The Nascent Mind of Shelley* (Oxford University Press, 15s.) and in order to do this he has closely followed the events of the poet's life to the spring of 1813. That part of the book is an admirable supplement to Mr. Blunden's recent biographical study, although the two books were in preparation at the same time. We see Shelley, the child and youth, in his relationship with his father and family; at school at Sion House and at Eton, and the scholastic and other influences of those two establishments. We see him at Oxford, where he met Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who was to play so large and troublesome a part in his brief life. We see him with his fiery passion for learning and for swift self-expression; his tract writing and expulsion from Oxford; his protracted quarrel with his father; his frustrated love for his cousin Harriet Grove and his impetuous marriage with the sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook when he was just nineteen. We see him racing his girl-wife up and down the country and over to Ireland, with no abiding place; espousing causes, helping lame dogs, reading avidly, talking and writing incessantly, driven on by his daemon. And through it all—so cleverly is Professor Hughes's book constructed—we are enabled to trace the growth of the poet's mind. Of family love he had little (he used to tell how, having returned once from school with a fever, his father would have sent him to a madhouse had he not been dissuaded); but of the larger love, embracing all humanity and the wide

universe, he had a constant and expanding vision which expressed itself in all his main utterances. He was supremely an intuitive thinker, but he was also immensely receptive to the intellectual influences of Plato and Lucretius, Dante and Milton, Godwin and Rousseau. In the case of so swiftly maturing a writer it could not be otherwise. Although Shelley fails as a constructive philosopher he gives us—and to a degree more than any other poet—what Professor Hughes calls “the gift of ecstasy and the joy in power . . . the foretelling and divining mind that, by his own account, is the breath of great poetry. He dreams a young man’s dream. And in an age awaking to intimations of a spiritual immanence alike in Man and Nature he is among the writers most conscious of it.”

In his new book, *The Poetic Image* (Cape, 8s. 6d.) Mr. C. Day Lewis defines quite simply the critic’s task as one “of easing or widening or deepening our response to poetry . . . yet we too often find in criticism to-day, passages in which dishonest controversy, undraped narcissism or glue-pot jargon reveal an attitude towards the reader of dogmatic contempt.” That is well said, and Mr. Day Lewis is himself admirably lucid and grinds no axes. In discussing the operations of the poetic imagination he is of course dealing with the very life-blood of poetry, but when he attempts to define the “image” in the first chapter he meets the difficulty that the imagination is variable and intangible. Pope’s imagination was obviously a very different affair from Blake’s, Shakespeare’s from George Herbert’s, Wordsworth’s from Yeats’s. There is the sub-conscious image or symbol, the conscious intellectual external ornament, the expression of the spirit “whose dwelling is the light of setting suns”, and the graceful metaphor or similitude. To find a common definition is probably impossible, but what can be done in a book of 160 pages Mr. Day Lewis does brilliantly. He quotes a little-known minor Victorian, by name E. S. Dallas, as saying “The production of imagery . . . belongs to the general action of the mind, in the dusk of unconsciousness”, thus anticipating Freud and Jung and their numerous disciples. Doubtless a vast work of sorting and labelling of images can be and will be undertaken, but that is a task for experts and annotators. Mr. Day Lewis does well to put modern poetry into proper perspective: he is a “modern” himself, but that does not prevent him from recognizing “far too much otiose and superfluous decoration in contemporary verse”. Novelty and audacity are, he says, “the strong-point, the presiding demon . . . and, like all demons, are apt to get out of hand.” He instances the “broken images” which abound in the work of so many dexterous moderns—imaging for its own sake and deriving, we should say, from a craze for singularity or from a loosening of intellectual controls—and reaches this conclusion: “A poetry which excludes the searchings of reason and the promptings of the moral sense is by so much the less impassioned, the less various and human, the less a product of the whole man at his full imaginative height. The images of such poetry will at best be forced images, springing from the artificially fertilized soil of sensibility, luxuriant, but short-lived and freakish.” *The Poetic Image*, by its unbiased and authoritative discussion of modern poetry, if for no other reason, is a book which should be studied by all lovers of the art.

The one remaining book of criticism on our table is also by a poet, Mr. Hugh l’Anson Fausset. *Poets and Pundits* (Cape, 12s. 6d.), consisting of addresses and of contributions mainly to the *Times Literary Supplement*, is a very satisfying collection linked together with one main thought, that man’s spirit must assume its conscious responsibility if a new and happier order of life is to reign in the world. This is the thought implicit in the essay on Tolstoy, in that on Whitman’s mysticism, in the noble chapter called “Be not anxious . . .” and in that on

"Rilke and the first world war". "Consciously or unconsciously poets have always wanted to create something organically complete, which would go on living an independent life of its own in the imaginations of men." Mr. Fausset says that in discussing Whitman, and it is clear that for this critic the impulse and the practice of poetry is a responsible and religious experience. With so much surface cleverness masquerading as poetry we cannot too strongly recommend the nobility of Mr. Fausset's latest contribution to creative criticism.

Coming back to the poets themselves, we are glad to have Mr. John Heath-Stubbs's volume of translated *Poems from Leopardi* (John Lehmann Ltd., 7s. 6d.). Leopardi, who died in Naples in the year of Queen Victoria's accession in his 39th year, was an aristocrat of straightened means, with a weak constitution and a congenital disposition towards melancholy and disillusionment. Put baldly like that it is not an attractive introduction to one who was a very great poet. A Romantic, but more analytical and questioning than his English contemporaries, he delineates his own suffering spirit within an acute perception of Nature, employing a classical exactness of phrase and form but enriching his language from the speech of the peasants. Mr. Heath-Stubbs compares him with Wordsworth. "He had," he says, "a finer and more delicate sensibility, I think, than the English poet, and though he sometimes falls into flatness, he is incapable of the sheer banality of Wordsworth's worst. But his range of human sympathies are, I think, narrower, and he can hardly master the power which Wordsworth, at his greatest, displays. Both had a total vision of Nature to record. That of Wordsworth was of her joy and creative power. That of Leopardi is negative." It remains to quote one complete poem, "To Himself", both as an illustration of Leopardi's prevailing mood and thought—the influence of which Schopenhauer acknowledged—and as an example of Mr. Heath-Stubbs' felicitous translating:

Now be for ever still,
 Weary my heart. For the last cheat is dead,
 I thought eternal. Dead. For us, I know
 Not only the dear hope
 Of being deluded gone, but the desire.
 Rest still for ever. You
 Have beaten long enough. And to no purpose
 Were all your stirrings; earth not worth your sighs.
 For spleen and bitterness
 Is life; and the rest, nothing; the world is dirt.
 Lie quiet now. Despair
 For the last time. Fate granted to our kind
 Only the dying. Now you may despise
 Yourself, nature, the brute
 Power which, hidden, ordains the common doom,
 And all the immeasurable emptiness of things.

A special interest attaches to the posthumous publication of Laurence Binyon's *The Madness of Merlin* (Macmillan, 6s.). It is Part I of an unfinished poem in dramatic form and Mr. Gordon Bottomley in his Introduction tells us that "it shared with his impressive translation of the *Divina Commedia* most of the thought and attention he could give to literary work for many busy years." It is thus a large fragment nearly sixty pages long, with Parts 2 and 3 lost to us at Binyon's death, and we are left to speculate "on the irrecoverable secrets that were meant to be unfolded." Mr. Bottomley says Binyon first mentioned handling

the Merlin theme in 1923, and adds, "It is only in recent times that poetry must use contemporary subjects in order to discuss contemporary life—and especially in a time of upheaval and change . . . Shakespeare must have considered the drama of Elizabeth and Essex; but it is only by his 'Antony and Cleopatra' that we divine his thoughts about them." Apparently Binyon, after much weighing of the various Merlins of legend, based his poem on Geoffrey of Monmouth's poem, making Merlin a Welsh prince who was broken in battle with the Scots and retreated into the forest where he lived like a wild animal. He was rescued and brought to the Cumbrian King's court, but returned to his solitary state and madness in the forest to utter the Prophecies by which he is cloudily remembered. Binyon's handling of the *dramatis personae* reveals a sure mastery. Merlin stands out, a Lear-like figure shaped in a poetic idiom as powerful as any Binyon employed:

Sleep is not peace. It is a wanderer's world,
Where we begin journeys that never end.
To hang on precipices none can scale
And none descend; be led under the seas
Where is no thought of man
But monstrous fishes glide
Opening mouths at you.

From this torso-like fragment, and from Mr. Bottomley's revelations of Binyon's plan, there can be no doubt that, had it been completed, this verse-drama would have gone into the repertory of English dramatic poetry.

With Mr. Herbert Read's *Collected Poems* (Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d.) we are in the presence of one of the most earnest and exciting minds of the century. He has not been, and probably never will be, a poet widely appreciated. He concedes nothing in expression. Having early decided against the traditional lyrical forms he has developed by way of Imagism an austere method of poetic statement which, as often as not, rejects rhyme and the conventional accessories of verse. In his first stage he was a thumb-nail poet, as in "April":

To the fresh wet fields
and the white
froth of flowers

Came the wild errant
swallows with a scream.

He was one of hundreds of imaginative observers of the visible world who made similar attractive little notes and published them in the coterie magazines. But with the first World War he applied the imagist method to sterner themes, as in "The Happy Warrior" and "The Crucifix"; he lengthened his utterance and gave us such heart-catching commentaries as "Kneeshaw Goes To War" and "The Execution of Cornelius Vane", in which all the indiscriminate brutality of mass warfare was indicted. And it was to that war that we owe Mr. Read's powerful presentation of the grisly operation of hate in the human mind, "The End of a War", in which, as he says in a prose note, he wished to show "the universal aspects of a particular event." Here indeed is pity and terror to purge the heart. But if, taking the whole poetic product of this rare modern mind as expressed in his *Collected Poems*, we yet turn by preference to the more traditional forms used by Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman—two equally compassionate poets—we shall not be misunderstood. When a modern poet can write of the tragedy of the two world wars with the echoing simplicity of a Burns, Peace may have found its best evangel.

A moving mysticism informs Mr. Rayner Heppenstall's *Poems*, 1933-1945 (Secker & Warburg, 7s. 6d.) when it is expressed in comprehensible language; but to one reviewer it does not always achieve that desired state:

I pray the tooth's edge learn soon
To love and offend none,
Or of its own anxiety wean
My death before it is grown.

Mr. Heppenstall is the wielder of a cloudy grandeur of language, but unless poetry is a personal occupation with a private code that seems not to be enough.

With the late Franz Werfel's *Poems*, translated by Edith Abercrombie Snow (Princeton University Press: London, Geoffrey Cumberlege, 11s. 6d.), and Mr. Fred Marnau's *Death of the Cathedral*, translated by Ernst Sigler (Grey Walls Press, 8s. 6d.), we come to two German poets (German, that is, in language, though Mr. Marnau is an Austrian who has been living in our midst). Franz Werfel was an accomplished writer in many departments—his novels are justly famous—and it is clear from these sensitive renderings by Mrs. Snow that he was a good poet. His themes are everyday human experiences, scenes and perceptions, and over all there plays a lambent light of what, for want of a more expressive word, we may call goodness. Mr. Marnau's verse goes deeper. He has a vivid concept of man's place in the universe as the agent of his own redemption. And he has, too, a remarkable command of expressive imagery:

Statesmen and warriors of every walk are like
the heavy ships which on the high seas
plough deep furrows where their paths
the waters cleave. But when each has passed
the flood lies back as heretofore.
No track is left behind for you, no hold.
Except a horror only which dismayed you
and was not to be seized before such presence.

There seems to be something lost in the translation, but the power of the original image is manifest.

The one anthology before us is *Poems from New Writing*, selected with a Foreword by John Lehmann (John Lehmann, 8s. 6d.) and we may say at once that it is a stimulating and provoking collection. Here are "nearly all the significant poets" of the decade 1936-1946 who appeared in "New Writing": not, it is true, a few we could mention, but a sufficiently bright galaxy to engage our eyes and understandings. And "newness" is not so aggressive a characteristic in this collection as might have been anticipated. Mr. Auden and Mr. Plomer romp quite saucily and delightfully in the ballad form, Mr. Day Lewis is represented by four poems including the lovely "The Revenant", Mr. Louis MacNeice has six poems and confirms his solid place in the contemporary firmament, Mr. Spender also has six poems and Miss Edith Sitwell has three, including the powerful "A Song of the Cold." Altogether this is an anthology not to be missed.

From the newest of the private presses comes a slim and handsome volume, Mr. Hugh Popham's *To the Unborn—Greetings* (The Dropmore Press, £2 12s. 6d.). It consists of three cantos—evidently from a longer work—and the verse is of a grave and measured quality suiting the high nature of the theme, the welcoming of a new life into this troubled world. "Man does not change," is the sad conclusion, but the poet asks:

Will nature at the last strike back
for all her laws' bred anarchy?

Even now the old foundations crack
 under our eyes. The teeming sea,
 the labouring earth, their tributary
 of food less render. Famine and war combine—
 and in the pitiless sky there comes no sign.

Symphonic Poems by Salvatore Cutino, reaches us from Los Angeles (Sunburst House) accompanied by holographs of pleasantly appreciative letters to the author from Sibelius and Helen Keller. These verses are smooth and sententious with a far cry of the Whitman spirit. And finally, we welcome two pamphlets, A. E. Morgan's *The Beginnings of Modern American Poetry* (Longmans, 1s.) which discusses the work of Frost, Sandburg, Masters and Vachel Lindsay, and *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* by Clive Sansom (Speech Fellowship, 2s.), which is the text of the excellent lecture given to The Poetry Society in the autumn of 1946. Mr. Sansom is an enthusiastic admirer of Mr. Eliot's work and there are many who will agree with him that "there is no other poet writing to-day with whom one is so conscious of a forward movement and penetration of the mind."

WILLIAM KEAN SEYMOUR.

Even at the increased price of 4s. Everyman's Library complete edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is wonderful value, enhanced by a valuable introduction by Prof. Emory Holloway, devoted not to biographical details but to a fresh penetrating examination of the importance and significance of Whitman in his life-time, since his death and most pertinently at the present time, as the poet of democracy. To-day more than in 1867 he can claim,

Of Life immense in passion, pulse and power,
 Cheerful, for freest action formed under the laws divine,
 The Modern Man I sing.

For as Professor Holloway admirably observes, "The reason Whitman thought that poetry is important to democracy and that only a poetic people could support great poets is that to him poetry is a sharing of significant experience. If, however, following a conventional aesthetics, it seeks to present satisfying complete expressions of such experience, it ends by making parasites of its readers. "Not so much the book needs to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does." Not parasites but poets Whitman would have his readers to be. This he accomplishes not indeed by assuming—what is palpably false—that all possess "the divine power to use words" but by teaching them to look with a poet's eye and to embrace life with a poet's sympathy and faith. Accordingly he seldom lulls the reader with repetitious patterns of metre and stanza. His art is more subtle than that, more suggestive. It demands greater collaboration on the part of the reader. Suggestions must be followed, sweeping generalisations must be vitalised by concrete reference, unaccustomed attitudes must be adopted, subdued music must be heard: but in doing these things the reader becomes himself a poet." Hence the enormous value and significance to this generation of this latest Everyman's.

In *Under T'Hawthorn* (Muller, 8s. 6d.) Dorothy Una Ratcliffe comes into her own as the Yorkshire dialect poet. She has more than grace and fluency and literary skill—she has a native's knowledge of the dialect and an ear for the sound as well as the sense of folk-speech and in these tuneful lyrics many almost forgotten words sparkle like jewels and are given a more permanent setting than dialect society's transactions can provide.

Anthology of God, chosen by Sir James Marchant, K.B.E., with a brief introduction by the late Lord Lang, provides a diversified collection of poems presenting various aspects and acclamations of the Deity (Cassells, 7s. 6d.). With a "Dedication to Sydney Walton, who knows 'the secret place of the Most High' ",—an arresting tribute to our distinguished colleague—these purposeful poems, many inspired with certainty and revelation, may do more than strengthen and deepen faith already possessed—they should help to remedy the present widespread want of a sense of God. A contemporary woman poet not represented in this collection wrote recently, "The only 'thing' that a human being can go on wanting all their life and be satisfied with just wanting, is God". He may be found in one or another of these poems, which one being according to the need and perception of the individual. And even those who, in Browning's phrase, "believe in soul, are very sure of God", may find further confirmation and illumination in these non-theological expositions of Divine being and immanence.

The bicentenary of Michael Bruce, who was born in March, 1746—he died 21 years later—revives the old dispute over the authorship of "The Ode to the Cuckoo", filched from Bruce by his fellow-student, James Logan, and doubly justifies T. G. Snoddy's biography of the shepherd-poet of the Lomond Braes (Blackwood, 10s. 6d.)—a timely and excellent piece of literary rehabilitation. Forty years ago the present writer was instrumental in publishing the first extensive review of the notable Logan controversy in a judicious, well-informed memoir of Michael Bruce by John Macfarlane, prefaced to the first popular edition of the poems of "the Keats of Scotland". Mr. Snoddy is fuller and more discursive than Macfarlane, but their conclusions correspond.

In the aptly entitled anthology, *The Poet's Cat* (Harrap, 7s. 6d.) we are presented by Mona Gooden with a considerable range of poems dealing with the various relationships and reaction of poets and cats with a beautiful characteristic engraving by Samuel Stephen Gooden as frontispiece.

The admiration and affection felt for their intimate companions by poets of all periods and many races, from an anonymous 8th century Irish monk to our current contributor Eva Martin, are revealed in diversified ways which we would like to examine and compare and quote, but space and the memory of several individual feline friends whom we have praised in prose incline us to concentrate on and adopt with poignancy the exquisite "Epitaphium Felis" translated from the Latin by Seumts O'Sullivan:

"By weight of the wearying years, and by grievous illness
Compelled, I come at last to the Lethean Lake-side;
'Have thou Elysian suns,' said Prosperina, smiling, 'Elysian
meadows.'
Nay, but if I deserve it, O kindly Queen of the silence,
Grant me this boon, one night to return to the homestead,
Home to return by night, and into the master's ear,
Whisper, 'Across the waste of the Stygian waters
Your Felis, most faithful of cats, still holds you dear.' "

I look forward to my copy of THE POETRY REVIEW with impatience. Each copy always seems to be better than the one before.—LILIAN F. BULLOCK, Bourne-mouth.

Poets and Pretenders

IT seems pertinent to remark that if only one-half of the substantial pile of books which have accumulated on our desk since our last issue possesses a glimmer of that vision without which it is said a people perish, then we need have no fears for our national situation. The vision referred to is, of course, that which inspires the poet and should inspire the statesman; no matter of intellectual facility but that deeper, more percipient vision which springs from moral qualities. Let us take heart prematurely perhaps from the fact that, while deadlock succeeds deadlock at Foreign Ministers' conferences where expediency and national interest enlist the world's brains to achieve sterility, so large a number of us seem to be concerned with a greater matter, Truth, about which there can be no argument but only a painful pursuit.

Aptly enough our first enquiry is into a book called *A Soul for Sale*, by Peter Kavanagh (Macmillan, 5s.), for there is a distinct sign of that chronic conflict between heart and mind (which used to be described, erroneously, as between mind and matter) in the alternation of the sincere with the synthetic, the emotional with the literary. Mr. Kavanagh feels some of his poems and thinks others. Where he feels them he is simple:

"One side of the potato-pits was white with frost—
How wonderful that was, how wonderful!
And when we put our ears to the paling-post
The music that came out was magical";

but when he thinks his poem out he becomes less arresting if more impressive:

"Primroses and the unearthly start of ferns
Among the blackthorn shadows in the ditch,
A dead sparrow and an old waistcoat. Maguire learns
As the horses turn slowly round the which is which
Of love and fear and things half born to mind."

For there are two sorts of poetry: that which springs from a personal emotional impulse and that which seeks to imbue an impersonal theme with the same immediacy of feeling. The poet may be imagined as first cogitating upon the selection of his theme. What shall he write about? Mary, Queen of Scots, or Nero? He then attempts the impossible task of inspiring himself with his mind, succeeding at best in producing only a fine piece of writing. Poets who complain that their lives are full of hard work are confessing a literary ambition which has little to do with poetry. That is the much less responsible matter of sitting beneath a bough in a carefree manner, waiting for the mood and the impulse, indifferent whether it comes now or next week.

Under Aldebaran, by James McAuley (Melbourne University Press, 6s.), the next subject for investigation, displays, alas, even less of that conflict which redeemed Mr. Kavanagh's book. Mr. McAuley plumps for the mind. The result is verse of more or less merit with an almost complete absence of that emotional content which could justify its existence. One of his best and simplest things, "Sleep", is quite contumacious in its austere determination to brook no nonsense:

"The rose that leans its chin
Upon a curving leaf
And looks across the land
Knows not my grief;

The slug that frets the leaf
Blindly with mincing jaw
Obeyes its life's command:

Each has a law
Within it and is free
Of my hard liberty.

Nature is sleep:
Beyond that sleep I press
Half-roused, yet cannot leap
to wakefulness."

There are many kinds of beauty and there is great truth in the adage that one man's meat is another man's poison. Even putting the matter with more moderation, we are not all nourished by the same food, and there may be, indeed we must suppose there are, people who can exist frugally on a diet of wind. The reflection is prompted by *The Planet in my Hand*, by Ruthven Todd (Grey Walls Press, 6s.), a book which is not devoid of tenderness or that brand of sincerity which is its parent, but which contains much too much clever verse in which there is neither. We have noted before a tendency in this poet's work towards the cerebral type of verse; but this last volume is rather more explicit in its lip service to a baser loyalty, to a merely clever versification in which there is small nourishment for the poetry lover. There is, too, as might be expected, an increase in that use of ugly language which must be due to a misconception of what is vital or significant in expression. Mr. Todd too often seems to be deliberately intent to avoid the smallest sign of really understanding his job, which is not to string words together in a "take it or leave it" manner—see what a fellow I am—but to rouse his readers to a state of sensitive delight in new revelations of beauty. He prefers often to be clever in a rough unmusical way and to escape from the smallest suggestion of lyricism. But lest we do him an injustice by conveying an impression that the author is incapable of better things either by choice or incompetence, we must quote a sonnet, no less, called "That Sweet Content":

"O Love, around your feet the stars are set
As jewelled jonquils in the meadow of your day;
From your gold head the mad moon can survey
The whirling world that floats on rivers of regret;
And in the ruined cities as you pass along
Ragwort and willow-herb make bright the broken bricks.
O should you ever chance upon the turgid Styx
Grim Charon might himself break into song.

O look, my love, upon my landscape here,
My healing sun shine on the scars that irritate—
Close up the cancers fed on petulance and fear.
O lay the railways for the precious freight
Each hopes to grasp before his time is spent,
The love that after furious fever has its sweet content."

It is hard to understand how the poet who wrote that could ever be content with the merely literary but it is harder perhaps to wait for inspiration.

A simpler, more musical note sounds in *Better than Laughter*, by Mildred Louise Boie (University of Minnesota Press), published here by Geoffrey Cumberlege for Oxford University Press. The poems spring naturally from personal experience, quietly enough in general, but with few lapses into such things as the "Girls in Sunlight", which has all the vulgarity of the moderns except unintelligibility and formlessness:

"What these hard browning bodies stretched in sun
Have felt or wanted, kept from doing or done,
No one can tell however many he sees
Hunching their hips to tan their undersides,
Stretching their legs in great immobile strides
To catch the stain even behind the knees.

And for what end they court with insolence
Of nudity the sun fire's welting, tense
Embrace on breast and buttock, face and thigh,
They will not say—whether to store its heat
For men, or therapeutically complete
The circuits of their volatile supply."

This is, however, no proper sample of the book. We quote it because we are even more alert to detect any incipient sign of backsliding in a poet of quality than in a confirmed offender. Mildred Boie has much better things to say and infinitely better ways to say them. Her customary note is fluidly eloquent, easy, imaginative and satisfying. Her idiom is often classical with rhyme and rhythm deftly handled with a sufficient tenderness to stir if not greatly to move the generous responses of the reader.

An Anthology of Modern Australian Poetry, selected by H. M. Green, also comes from Geoffrey Cumberlege (Oxford University Press, 8s. 6d.). This is a substantial book but welcome for the evidence it affords of the existence of a simpler, less turgidly literary style in the antipodes than we have encountered lately. The compiler informs us that his selections overlap the boundaries that separate natural periods; i.e., those of romantic nationalism and disillusioned modernity. The books we have seen recently have come, evidently, from poets who have been unable to retain their illusions in a modern world, or as we prefer to express it, their sense of values in a Gadarene existence. We like more obstinacy in our poets, a sterner refusal to be conditioned by circumstance, as befits an oracle. Anyone can behave like a reed in the wind but it is for the poet to stand firm in a windy age.

A second anthology, *Poetry Scotland No. 3*, tells a different tale. Could disillusion go much farther than the following by G. S. Fraser:

"Because the contradiction does not allow
Us to be happy and also to know how
I will give a penny to anyone who begs
And say my prayers at night to a girl's legs."

This is but the first verse of a long effort, full of strong words, which is neither more nor less than we have been led to expect from our new schools, from which there are other samples in this collection which is said to be one of the leading regular anthologies with a world audience. It may be so, although we doubt that it has a permanence sufficient for so wide a circulation. Modernity like any other vogue or fashion is ephemeral. It may suit a period, like the bowler hat, which it somehow rather resembles with its insensitive brutality, but it has no survival value. That is reserved for the natural rhythms of our blood and for the loftier conceptions of the spirit. The usual quota of poems in the native Doric is present in this volume and even a few in Gaelic. Our Scottish poets, for all their modernity, are obstinately parochial. We look forward to their escape into a wider world with some quaint verses in Basic.

Robert Herring in *Westward Look* (Poetry Scotland No. 9, 6s.) is an experimenter with forms. That is to say he is intrigued by manner to a degree which often reacts adversely upon his matter. Here is an example:

"I can say	Can do
nothing.	Only overcoat deeds,
Can think	Fold on Fold against fog."
nothing.	

It is as if the author said "let us have fun with words" and proceeded to make mud-pies with them. Many of his poems certainly have no more clarity than that opaque comestible. He is against plain speaking but is not shy, indeed he is loquacious but we cannot leave him without quoting four lines which must have been written to comfort and encourage us. They are in italics:

"If past repair
Still do not rue.
Met soon, despair
leaves time to get used to."

We met it sooner but shall never find it familiar.

Spirit Level, by Christopher Morley (Harvard University Press) issued in this country by Geoffrey Cumberlege for Oxford University Press at 14s., is little more than a volume of light verse, full of slang and notable only for a certain American sickness of expression. The following final stanzas of a four-verse poem are a fair sample:

"Since they are men, not mice,
Dogma is No Dice.
I only say, Look Twice.

So, in retrospect, Good spake:
Give everything, even the snake,
A double take."

This sort of thing is all very well, and we do not deny its ability, but as wit it is unremarkable and as serious poetry repellent. In other moods Mr. Morley is cerebral. In a poem called "Conifer" he has this to say:

"A sonnet, like a fir-cone, has its flanges
Ingenuously clustered, shaped and tilted
To catch the maximum of air and sun.
Grouped on a stalk of syntax, with tongue hinges;
And if it falls where any soil is silted
Some casual new sonnet is begun.

What are these woods, this scenery on the jag,
But rhyme and pattern, patiently defined
By season and erosion and the storm:
Understatements in green, lyrics of crag,
Each for itself (dictated but not signed)
Is satisfied by Necessary Form.

The squirrel chaws, and cones he thought the poorest
Sometimes grow up to be a National Forest."

Almost the worst sonnet we remember.

Edward Lowbury, who once won the Newdigate, is responsible for the next volume, *Crossing the Line* (Hutchinson, 6s.). This is an unimpressive book about many things but none of them important. The versification is in various modes but unlit by emotion and pedestrian in quality. There is, however, nothing plodding about Miss E. J. Scovell in *Midsummer Meadow* (Routledge, 5s.). She goes by leaps and bounds but still fails to touch the heart. Where for instance is the subtle emotional appeal of such things as "Alone":

"Nothing will fill the salt caves our youth wore:
Happiness later nor a house with corn

Ripe to its walls and open door.
 We filtered through to sky and flowed into
 A pit full of stars; so we are each alone.
 Even in this being alone I meet with you."

That will suffice perhaps for an example of the author's technique. It is agile enough but only with an imaginative flexibility which is not adequate for the creation of poetry. The book is but one more collection of verses upon many themes, competent, even clever, but uninspiring.

The more often we read what is written upon the dust covers of books of poetry, the less we seem to know. Our simplicity has denied us a whole world of significant knowledge; and it becomes increasingly apparent that one should not read poetry for its spiritual power but for a host of more important reasons. Hear what Archibald MacLeish has to say of Miss Eve Merriam on the cover of *Family Circle* (Yale University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 14s.):

"Miss Merriam is not yet mistress of the art of looking through by looking past but she has learned its possibilities. She is capable of the seeming carelessness of eye by which these meanings can be captured. It is not easy, particularly for a young writer, to let the first perception stand as it is with whatever truth it has caught. It is not easy either to push the naturalness of the first perception through to that other naturalness which the labor of art contrives. Most beginning work is bogged down between: the freshness lost and the work of art not yet created. Miss Merriam has other qualities to be admired. She uses the spoken tongue justly and with inward meaning. Her poems, that is to say, are not decorated with words taken from the vocabulary as a summer visitor's room might be hung with marine nets and pieces of lobster pot. Her poems are written in the other vocabulary, with the result that her language is all of one piece."

Having read which we confess we are no wiser, nor any more ready to digest Miss Merriam's verse. Indeed it seems to us to be a great fuss about very little, for, read as we might, and did, we came away impoverished in soul. It is only fair that we should be allowed to support our opinion by quotation, but the difficulty is what to select. We will use a pin with our eyes closed.

"Surely you know

Her people have no money, they live hard with working hands.

No piano in the parlor, flowers on the table, nothing grand.

And when they say Hello

It's with a funny accent, not one you're used to at all.

There are brownish cabbage smells in the dark front hall."

Chance is not less just than prejudice.

We are getting very discouraged about this matter of vision which we must possess or perish. Perhaps it is we who are blind. But the next book, opened at random, gave us the following gem of beautiful (?) verse:

"Around a hectic electric moon,

Its sexual organs startingly reflexed

The green baboon

Goes swinging, swinging, from one gold chandelier

To the next.

Circles, circles above the waste
 Of women, the flat-faced, fat-faced,
 The slug-faced, bug-faced, coarse-faced, horse-faced,
 And the faceless men encased in starch."

This appears in *By the Clock 'Tis Day*, by Alan Morton and Desmond Greaves (Clock House Press, 3s. 6d.) and is by the first-named. We will enquire no further in his half of the book but consider Mr. Greaves. His portion has some highly critical poems upon recently dead worthies, writes for libel not issuing from the grave; and some much better things, including a quite long "Ode to Poetry" which we began out of curiosity and finished for the pleasure of it. It is much too good to tuck right away at the end of such a book. The last should be first.

Paschal Lamb, by Doris Ferne (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.) could scarcely come to hand more appropriately than at this moment of writing. It would be welcome however at any season for its tender simplicity of word and meaning. Mrs. Ferne puts no veils between her heart and ours; no pretences and no intellectual parades obscure our vision or divert it. She holds us quite secure with the minimum of apparent effort; holds us in fact by that power of simple and direct vision which could make the world safe. How very far such poems as hers are from the cerebral verse which the same world thrusts at us so assiduously. They are, of course, upon another plane altogether; not clever, sincere never pretentious, almost anonymous in their lack of egotism and their welcome for the reader into the spiritual realm. She talks of love, of the seasons, of ordinary human things but speaks with her heart, with delicate perception and subtle power; not with her head and with self-conscious art. Yet Mrs. Ferne has a perfected art which the following sonnet, "Victory", shall prove; but it is like the fragrance of a rose, natural, unassuming and subordinate to a greater beauty:

"If death were true I could not bear to live,
 For that grim shadow ever hovering near
 Would touch with ghostly fingers all you give
 And tarnish golden love and joy with fear.
 'For life is fleeting as a summer cloud,
 The rose, the bird, and you must pass away,
 And all your life be shaded with the shroud
 I hold in readiness.' So Death would say.
 'I am supreme, for I possess the key
 To crumbling worlds that fall beneath my power,
 For Life, and Love itself, must bow to me,
 And I decree the span shall be, an hour.'
 If death were true . . . ah ! but we do not die,
 For love has proved that death is but a lie."

Some excellent songs are sung in *Threnody for Dormice*, by Ruth Tomalin (Fortune Press, 5s.) and if the note is careless the prosody is not, but exhibits a technique perfectly adequate and as unobtrusive as adequacy always is. Poems like these may quite properly be praised, since they are a sincere and by no means negligible attempt to create beauty. They are not careerist, and being written to charm not impress, achieve their pleasant goal with the complete goodwill of the reader. We are delighted to quote one of them ("Song of the Nine Wells") which is a good example of a gift which will doubtless deepen in time into a richer talent:

"SONG OF THE NINE WELLS"

"The sycamore, magnolia-budding, tells
where crocus hills burn anthers of clear snow;
a child went wandering by nine bright wells;
the talking waters know
why April tolls a carillon of bells
for long ago.
White primrose, copper cowslip, straight and rare,
starred patterns in a wilderness of days;
king wren and stalking cat and golden hare,
the curlew's Celtic phrase,
and lambs along the green roads of Kildare
peopled his ways:

For once a wild moon brought to that wild shore
a Spring of silver cherries and green dreams;
the red moon swimming up from Ballymore
lit candles in nine streams:
nine lustres will not dim this shining store
of kingcup gleams."

Mary Winter Were, whose new book, *The Pilgrim Way* (Bagster, 2s. 6d.), has already been read to an appreciative audience of this Society, reveals the same tender lyrical sensitiveness as in her previous books but with a somewhat greater intensity of feeling. Her songs, many of them devotional, are simply phrased and all have that indefinable note of inspiration, as of things written without premeditation, or consciousness of self. They are thus of the pure vintage of poetry expressed from the fruitage of a gentle nature unsoured by experience; and if the wine is light it is still golden and full of radiance. The following little poem ("The Cripple") is a good example of Mrs. Were's art:

"He came with head low-bowed, as though the earth enticed
His weariness. To thud of crutches' dull refrain
His loose limbs swung as swings a tangled chain . . .
But when he heard my footsteps in the lane,
His eyes, deep pools of patience wed with pain,
Lifted, and on his face I read the peace of Christ."

More lyrical but with much less feeling are the rather literary poems of Constance M. H. Gemmell, *Through Scottish Windows* (Cornish, 3s. 6d.). Pleasant enough to read, they, for the most part, make only a slight impression and bear the unmistakable sign of verses written from an inadequately emotional impulse or mood. Where she is not concerned with emotion, save perhaps that of affectionate amusement, she is at her best, as the first two stanzas of "Hieland Sandy" show:

"Wi' a chanter and decanter,
He's as happy as a King,
He'll sing ye 'Annie Laurie'
And perform the Hieland Fling;
He's as merry as a thristle,
Or a blackie on the wing,
On a bonnie blithesome New Year's morning !

W' his pipe o' shaggy 'baccy,
And a goodly tot o' rum,
He gets himsel' sae jokesome

That he makes the clachan hum;
 Ye can almost see guid-humour
 In the reekin' o' his lum,
 On a bonnie blithesome New Year's morning !"

The author must learn to identify herself more deeply with her themes and cultivate if she can a much more introverted approach to them.

Much the same sort of thing is to be found in *The Immortal Scene*, by William Wolff (British Authors' Press, 5s.). Here are many poems written from a literary impulse and in that respect well done. It cannot be repeated too many times that a poem needs emotion for its creation and not merely the spare time and the gift of prosody. Poetry is of the heart not a thing of the mind and Mr. Wolff shows this clearly enough in his love poems. Here the emotional impulse comes through clear and strong and impacts against our own heart. Love is, of course, an emotional impulse which is felt not only by poets. These latter must contrive to be emotionally inspired also by other things. But let us quote a couple of stanzas of a poem called "Dear Love" which is not the only love poem in the book but which enshrines well enough the living virtue of inspiration:

"Will not a new day come
 When, worn with time's misuse,
 The tender tones of love shall die
 Within our older throats?

O darling, lest it be,
 Let no hot, angry word fly from my lips
 Lest it re-echo chilled and bleak from yours:
 And, as the flame of our dear love burns fast,
 So may I evermore
 Fail not to feed the fire."

Dom Ambrose Agius O.S.B. sends his book of poems, *Winged Chariots*. These poems have all more or less a religious impulse and their devotional note is well enshrined in his excellent prosody. Religious subjects are among the most difficult either to criticise or to poetise and for the same reason that the impulse which creates them is so familiar that we are not moved by it to a very urgent emotional state. It is a hard saying but true that the vicissitudes of one's life move us more deeply than our most cherished beliefs but that is beyond doubt part of the frailty of our mortal flesh. Dom Agius has written a book in which sincerity and a lyrical power carry his themes if not in winged chariots certainly upon light feet. Here is a short poem, "Christmas 1929":

"I am weary of toil;
 Over-long is the fight.
 Who will give me repose?
 Holy, merciful Night,
 Hast thou stolen my Lord,
 Who is all my delight?

He is not in the Town
 Where the revellers cry,
 Ask the myriad stars,
 Stepping-stones in our sky
 For His angels to tread,
 Is the cavern hard by?

Silent figures appear
 Where I lonely had been.
 And their eyes are on fire,
 If their garments are mean.
 Enter brother and see
 What we shepherds have seen.

My Beloved lies still
 As a bird in the nest.
 Lo, a Child in a crib,
 Lo, a Babe at the breast.
 God is He . . . and is dumb!
 But my heart is at rest."

We have been sent a book of poems, *Mayfly*, by Paula Mango with a request for a criticism. The book was published in India and is obtainable from the Theosophical Publishing House, Madras. We are not told whether the authoress is a native of India, but judging by the way in which in many places the English language is handled we should deduce some slight unfamiliarity with it as compared with an English-born writer. We may say of these poems that the feeling in them is more apparent than the author's prosodic skill. This is, however, a better augury for the future than the reverse, since the approach to genuine poetry is from the heart and this is seldom to be learned or acquired by those who need to do so. Skilful prosody, on the other hand, if one has any gift in that direction, can speedily be mastered. In many places Paula Mango is somewhat obscure in meaning and we would recommend her to observe greater care in this respect. It is not always easy to say with clarity what one wishes to convey but it is quite easy to persuade oneself that it has been successfully done when it is not so.

Another request for a review has reached us from W. McNeillage Rusack who has sent us his book, *Voyaging Canvas*, published at 2s. 6d. This is full of simply written but sincere poems mainly about the sea and they all have that excellent lyrical note which we associate with sea-songs and which one would confidently expect from a master mariner. That is to say, of course, that there is no great emotional power in them. But Mr. Rusack obviously sought for no such thing. He was content to write as the spirit moved him and to bring to this labour of love an excellent gift for versification and a nice discrimination for words and their appropriate use.

Another book, *The Poems of a Prisoner of War*, comes to us from its author, Charles Dick. These are illustrated quite attractively by the author himself and both the poems and the pictures reveal a temper which undoubtedly put a bold face upon tribulation, finding what solace it could in adversity. The prosody is excellent and the poems sincere and simply phrased with here and there a moving nostalgic note natural enough in the circumstances. The book was printed by the *Northumberland and Alnwick Gazette* from whom no doubt copies may be had (price 3s.).

Three small books by Giles Dixey: *Sonnets in Sand*, *Hymns without Faith*, and *Sonnets from Libyan Tripoli*, have been sent to us by their author with the surprising information that these had been printed and produced by his own hand. We may say at once that the type and printing is first-rate and we will go further and congratulate the author upon his prosodic mastery of the sonnet if we cannot at the same time congratulate him upon the use to which he puts many of them. We are somewhat particular about sonnets, preferring that they be reserved for those incandescent ejaculations of pure poetry which the great masters of this form believed to be their proper use. That is not to quarrel with the virtuosity of Mr. Dixey. He has richer music in him but has not yet tuned his lyre.

Philip Chadwick is entitled to real commendation for a book, *Dawn Music*, printed in Brighton (Dolphin Press, 3s. 6d.). In a foreword he confesses to the fact that he has not often sought publication and has only submitted to the persuasion of friends in launching this volume upon the world. His poems are well worthy of a wider public than his own circle, for there is in all of them the definite note of true poetry. This is a trite enough statement but the mystery of the "why and how" of poetry is impenetrable. One recognises it immediately, but is as unable to describe it as a flavour or an aroma. It exists, and that is all we know of it beyond its effect upon the reader. For him a door opens, a welcoming

door which, being passed, causes him to forget both himself and the author in an easy but complete absorption in the quite ordinary and familiar words he is reading. More than this one may only guess of the cause of so mysterious a creation. For our part we believe it to be a matter of the moral attitude of the author. The absence in Mr. Chadwick of even that amount of egotism which could make him interested in publication is possibly the answer. To hide one's light is also to shield it. To write for oneself alone is to forget oneself and to release from those depths within a truer and richer voice than that with which we address the world. We will quote one of his few sonnets ("For Freedom") not only because this will show his competence in prosody's most difficult form, although his is an amalgam of the two better known kinds, but because he has been able to make a living thing of it—a much more difficult achievement:

"These men have died. If, as the faithful say,
They still live on, what of us do they ask?
Is it now naught to them, that final task,
That sweat of death which closed the bitter day?
Are they at peace? Or is no peace for these
Who chanced the last unknown for simple things
Like home and those they loved? Were sufferings
The end of suffering, eternal ease?"

Or do they in that life, hard won thro' death,
Sorrow and march with us that we complete
The halting truth which drove them? Do they meet
Our struggling souls, urging to the last breath;
Telling that more must die and more again
But crying in their deaths, not die in vain?"

We hope Mr. Chadwick will find a wide public and we shall be glad if our words assist so good an enterprise. He must preserve his selflessness otherwise.

Four new books, uniform in price (5s.) and format, have reached us from a single firm, Messrs. George Routledge & Sons, so long and honourably associated with poetry publishing. All have excellent titles and are by well known authors and are therefore deserving of individual attention. The first by Alex Comfort, "The Signal to Engage" (Routledge, 5s.) is, like his previous books, distinguished by fire rather than feeling, by energy rather than emotion, and often seems to care little for that integration of utterance necessary for easy reading. There is, too, some violence of expression which we have regretted in previous books, a violence which adds nothing to tragedy. Mr. Comfort is a modern in his apparent belief that emotion can be conveyed by literary expression inspired by his discontents, but his method is too objective and conscious for that result, if indeed he has any such purpose—which is not to deny that his poems have beauty; but their beauty is hard and somewhat accusing and lacks the power to touch the heart however it may impress the head. We do not believe, even when we admire, that this sort of thing is poetry. Poetic language, vision, imagination, are all present in profusion, but the identification of the author with his themes is too abnormal or too remote to capture that greater power of compelling an emotional response in the reader. We will not select for quotation an ugly passage, although these do not lack, but one to which no squeamish exception can be taken. The following will illustrate well enough both the quality of the author's work and its difficult mental appeal:

"The moon fills up its hollow bowl of milk
bodies grow blue like pebbles in a stream
and light falls like a wind in summer stripping
girls into statues, showing their round limbs
moving but frozen under the watery cloth:
to-night I watch her mask move into sleep
her breathing like a bee on a wood's floor
coming and going to and from the light.

"She is my field, and in her furrows run
my ways like rain, and the crops of her shadows
are pools, are a wild sea. And she has mountains
stranger than feathers, hard as fishes. There
fall in her hollows shadows of orchard trees
that follow the moon's circle like a tide
grassy nets that move on the dropped apples."

This sort of mind-searching is not a marked characteristic of the next volume by John Heath-Stubbs called "The Divided Ways" (Routledge, 5s.). This approach is quieter and the result and perhaps the cause is a more genuine and a deeper feeling. It is not possible to express emotion in any but simple language and if Mr. Heath-Stubbs is not always simple the imaginative power revealed by him is warmer in quality as less cerebral, than that of Mr. Comfort. His language has distinction but is not overpacked with it, a fault which the last-named author has not avoided. Enough is as good as a feast, however, and too much can never seem less than ostentation. Here is a short quotation from a poem "Alba", in which these qualities are apparent. We regret we have no space for more.

Now day comes, and the jealous light,
Parting lover and lover; now the sky
To eastward flames, and the poor shadows
Shrink backward to the West, to a waste chamber.

The dark wings of the night that shadowed us
Beat westward, like the swan whom a keen hound
Has startled from her nest on the salt-marshes".

"The Inward Eye" by Norman McCaig (Routledge, 5s.), the third of these uniform publications, is an alarming retrogression compared with the last book. A passage from a poem, "The Sun Worshipper", which is not at all untypical of the author's style, will demonstrate sufficiently his deliberate and sustained effort to be unusual in his diction. Not for Mr. McCaig are the simplicities of utterance: he sees no beauty in austerity but seeks to synthesize it with an indefatigable artistry in which there is small attempt to reconcile the result with reason:

"In cold museums I enlarge my sun
with language crumbling in the vivid air,
being pagan of a sort. All night I scan
the movement of the mood. Its character
writes goats and frenzies on the inhuman light
the sun makes turbulent, and songs that are
blood in the day are sacrificed by night.

Cloud-burst of sun rain down your bookish fire
where trees unfold their speechless exequies,
where rocks like masks speak suddenly in my ear;

and I, in terror, watch the sun that mounts
great mounds of language and in glass Julys
petrifies Pan into unlikely plants."

There is little pleasure and no profit in the perusal of this sort of thing for it never gets beyond the mind and halts on the hither side of comprehension. Even if it achieved our intellectual understanding we should possess nothing but a key to the mental processes of the author which are no great matter.

The last of this foursome is "Break In Harvest" by Roland Mathias (the contributor of the admirable appreciation of Robert Frost in our last issue), and we may say of it that whatever this modern disease may be its ravages have left their mark between its covers. There is a mite more comprehensibility no doubt in such things as "Balloon Over the Rhondda". We quote a bit of it:

"We had gone down to Tabor, to the door,
My corduroy a green
Tug at the ministerial spleen, a tweak
At the white scarf-knot, peak in pocket seen
Capping the diaconate,
In time to scalp the noise
And scamper made by boys, evacuees
With paper aeroplanes the teasing wind
Forced down behind the chapel rails.
Sighs from the big seat
Came barely out
Above the scrabble of the eager boots
Climbing the gate

for paperweight

The tease was bold that night,
Suborns of bigger men had gone adrift:
The little clusters in the street
Sent eyes up to the south
And feet were still.

A silver elephant with wings
Came curvetting and lolloping
With a one-sided smile.
He turned and chortled, lay down on his back
And laughed, helpless and rolling.
Up from the east came the stern searing of
The pursuit wasp,
In the ballooning laughter poured
First secondsworth of venom and a silence,
Then the wide curve of steady preparation
And seconds more."

but there is still an inadequate appreciation of the fact that writing is fine only in proportion to its immediate clarity. It is true indeed that poetry is fit only for the attentive, even concentrated, reader but we are quite sure that stuff like this which demands so much virtuosity to peruse has no title to poetic status. It has its own curious but spurious value which however is no concern of a review of poetry.

And to complete this survey of new poetry we welcome two numbers of the

Canadian Poetry Magazine. An undertaking of this kind, even if from necessity it is run on commercial lines, is of the greatest value to contemporary culture. From a survey of the contributions, however, we would suggest that what is still needed is a little less of that dull literary flavour and a larger dash of a heart-warming, intoxicating spirit which is called, variously, emotion or feeling. A clue to what is wrong is possibly to be found in the following paragraph which is contained in an editorial article designed to administer advice to poets:

"A poem can be written only by some one who knows how to write; there is no exception to that rule. Poetry is an exciting, difficult craft, and it takes years of hard work and education and a sense of language. Rhyme and metre do not make a poem; they produce by themselves nothing but doggerel. The real flesh and blood of poetry lies in turns of phrases, vivid images, new and unusual thoughts and manners of expressing them. A good poem is good because it is an unusual, imaginative, arresting way of writing English . . ."

The prescription which is given so confidently in this passage whilst unexceptional so far as it goes, leaves out the vital essence. The result of any such incomplete recipe must always be verse, a dead thing dressed in all the habiliments of poetry, but lifeless. This indeed is how we should describe the greater part of the excellent literature presented for our consideration in these two numbers. We object also to the statement made in a succeeding paragraph that the poet is a literary man, not because it is untrue but because it is not emphasized, as is necessary, that the converse does not follow, inevitably or even probably. Had this been done we should have applauded. A poet must indeed be a literary man, but how much more!

* * *

ILLUSTRATED EXCURSIONS

It was, I think, Tambimuttu with some of his earlier "Editions Poetry London", who first started the current vogue for books of poems with accompanying illustrations. Certainly his "Poems 1937-42" by David Gascoyne with illustrations by Graham Sutherland and "The Glass Tower" by Nicholas Moore with illustrations by Lucian Freud remain landmarks in this field. Frederick Muller Ltd. have since brought out an illustrated series of "New Excursions into English Poetry" under the general editorship of W. J. Turner and Sheila Shannon. These are anthologies of English Poetry, each selected on one particular theme and covering the earliest times to the present day. As with the "Poetry London" editions the accompanying designs for each book are in the hands of an established artist who is more than a mere book illustrator. The first collections appeared some time ago and included "English, Scottish and Welsh Landscape Verse" chosen by John Betjeman and Geoffrey Taylor, with lithographs by John Piper, "The Poet's Eye" chosen by Geoffrey Grigson with lithographs by John Craxton, and "Sea Poems" chosen by Myfanwy Piper with lithographs by Mona Moore. Each book is sold at half-a-guinea. More recently have appeared "Soldiers' Verse" chosen by Patric Dickinson with lithographs by William Scott, "Poems of Death" chosen by Phoebe Pool with lithographs by Michael Ayrtton, and "Travellers' Verse" chosen by M. G. Lloyd Thomas with lithographs by Edward Bawden.

"Soldiers' Verse" I find something of a misnomer, since much of the contents is not by soldiers. "Poems of War" would have made a better and more exact

title, or "Poems for Soldiers". The selection, however, is simple and good and it is clear that the editor in making it was thinking of poems that could be easily understood at a first reading or hearing. As he points out in his preface, his is a personal rather than an inclusive choice. The book will make a pleasant gift for the young conscript and may also be a pleasing addition to the bookshelves of the demobbed.

In "Poems of Death" Phoebe Pool has aimed more at the inclusive choice. Her selection is sure and representative and she has found pieces that were obvious and yet out of the way, like "Burials" from Crabbe's "Parish Register", and Psalm 90—"Order for the Burial of the Dead". In reading this selection I was suddenly struck with the query as to who would deliberately buy this book, for the subject is not one which would normally and consciously appeal to the living. At all events those with the death wish or of a melancholy cast of mind will be splendidly catered for. The poet Donne, it will be remembered, dressed himself in a shroud and measured himself in his coffin while still alive.

"Travellers' Verse" is arranged as an eccentric world tour and takes the reader on a pilgrimage both rich and varied, where he may be shipwrecked with Byron's Don Juan, visit strange Afrikanders with Hilaire Belloc, or find at Venice with Thomas Moore, that it is impossible anywhere to escape the "curst, round English face". Among the rarities are "Monk" Lewis' "The Tropic Genius", John Kenyon's "The Travelled Oyster", and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "Verses written in the chiosk at Pera, overlooking Constantinople". And the moderns are represented by the Grecian calm of Lawrence Durrell's "Nemea" and the torrid foreboding of Alun Lewis' "Indian Day". But I feel that the selection from the Middle East, familiar to many through overseas service during the war, would have been improved by the addition of a few strong recent pieces such as G. S. Fraser's "Egypt" or Keith Douglas' "Cairo Jag".

The illustrations to all three books are excellent. The artists appear to have been given a free hand and for this the publishers are to be congratulated.

JOHN WALLER.

Odyssey

A LONG the glimmering pathway, which the moon
Imprints upon the waves, my reveries wander
Out to Infinitude. What land lies yonder
Where world dissolves and powdery stars are strewn?
What undiscovered isle hides all alone,
Charm-bound, with fabulous coves of magic plunder,
Where that unending silver lane dips under
Ocean's dim edge into the blue Unknown?

Who'll follow me over the unfooted seas?
We may find Death and Limbo, or simply Night
And Silence; or we may find the sheer light
That moonstruck men imagine in a dream.
Who'll dare with me beyond the ghostly rim
To rediscover the Hesperides?

T. Bouch.

Dynamics of American Poetry: CXVII

We welcome the 16th volume of poems by Grace Noll Crowell, the Poet Laureate of Texas (Harper & Brothers). Here is a most compelling poem to Beauty:

"The pure white fire of beauty burns forever.
Cities may be blasted from the earth
And the cherished homes of men be felled; but never
Can loveliness be lost. The gentle mirth
Of wind goes rippling through the tawny grasses,
New flowers blossom from the latter rains;
All that is tortuous and ugly passes,
But beauty—beauty remains.

Life's troubled waters cannot quench that fire.
Men's hate can never blur the sun's gold light,
Nor mar the moon's pale silver, as still higher
The steadfast stars climb up earth's darkest night;
And love, long crushed within the hearts of men,
Will rise—will rise again!

We cannot pass by a eulogy of "The Petrarchan Sonnet":

"Through olden dark-ceiled rooms the dancers met
In purple velvet and in silken lace,
And tripped the measure through with courtly grace,
To the metered music of the minuet.
And there were poets who could not forget
The lyric-haunted theme—who sought to trace
With ink and pen each dancer's fitted place,
And thus the sonnet's rhythmic lines were set.

An aristocrat, indeed, the sonnet goes:
A stately step, a bow, a finger kiss—
It moves a graceful minuet of rhyme,
And smoothly sweet the music of it flows,
A soothing thing and gentle—after this,
The syncopated unrest of our time."

In "Reliving" we find Mrs. Crowell has touched upon the heartstrings and we quote from the first and last lines:

"Age often casts a strange consoling spell
Upon the heart:
Through the prismatic lens of memory . . .
Reliving some bright hour, when time is slow,
Brings something to the aged, Youth cannot know."

Not only does Mrs. Crowell deal with the higher aspects of poetry but she is sympathetic to the human reactions of life. In the first four lines of "Cowboys" she gives us a most human appreciation, and at its close she leads us again into real poetry:

"High-heeled boots and a bow-legged walk,
With a lingo that only cowboys talk—
In broad-brimmed hats and skin-tight pants,
They line up in small-town restaurants . . .
Out with the wind where the plains are wide,
And they take on something of the wind's own grace,
And something of the sun on throat and face . . .

Oh, the sculptured beauty, the muscled force
Of a man welded tight to a rearing horse!"

It appears that frontiers and borders are in the minds of all to-day. Mrs. Crowell shows us a very wise understanding of "The High Frontier":

"Forever men have sought for new frontiers;
Have fought to gain them, and have died to win
Far goals that greed had set throughout the years;
Have strained to be where no one else has been.
They sought the far horizons of the West,
They gave up sheltered homelands to attain
Mirages that would never let them rest,
Far distances that they could never gain.

And now the last frontier—the last far call!
The only unclaimed space the starlit sky.
We must look upward if we look at all,
Our hearts must heed the ancient, urgent cry:
'Look now toward Heaven.' God's own clear-set goal
That man must win if he would save his soul."

We have in *The Living Stone*, by Marion Strong White (Coward-McCann, Inc.) some jolly good rhyming. The funmakers of this world, like the medicine men, save our lives and we are grateful for Marion Strong White, who belongs to New York State. I am looking forward to enjoying her portraiture of children and paintings.

The Spectre Image (Simon & Schuster) is John Nerber's first appearance in book form, though he has appeared in many magazines. It is to be noted that very many men and women, of many minds and experience, are coming into the poetry world—more so than in the years gone by. Mr. Nerber has been forester, an aircraft engine inspector, a professional picket, and has served in the Maritime Service of this country. In 1940 this author won a first prize among the Avery Hopwood Awards for fiction and he is at present working on a novel in his home in Connecticut.

Very graphic is this poet's picture of "Base Hospital":

"We linger on the edge of measured pain,
The glassy mercurials rise and fall
Within the poles that signal our defeat
The flags run up their colors on the chart
To codify the blood streams of our war;
Meanwhile we lie wondering what we will,
Staring at our great room where forty lie,
Our forty thieves sealed each in his own jar.

The doctor counts, we listen to his breath:
Will this one live? we wonder easily,
Asking the shell which constitutes each self,
Yet follow with our eyes his roving course
From bed to bed, from state to state of health;
Two beds away he notes recovery,
His signature will suffice upon the sheet:
This one will rise like Lazarus and walk.

"THE BASE HOSPITAL"

Beside, in the next bed a boy dies,
Or will lie dying, fighting for his breath
With pus-choked lungs until to-morrow;
The doctor glances briefly, shakes his head,
Then gravely signs the little life away,
The red rape of eviction from a bed,
While motioning to the aides to move him out
Into that room which lies next door to death.

Pain is proprietary, at most unkind,
Holding a whip that lashes at our senses,
Flicking each nerve that keeps us here inert,
To force the road that leads it to the heart;
But mostly this master teaches us our self,
The germ of "I" that floats upon a bed
Guarded by aisles and charts
And whorls of skin upon our fingertips.

At night, lying sleepless, arguing with pain
We learn at last with whom we really live.
Through suffering learn how one boy dies,
Dying alone, while everyone looks on
Helpless and stricken, unequal to his death;
It is too close; in each of us there dies
Another boy supplanted by a man
Aloof and far removed from even paid."

Also we give a short "Sleep Poem":

"O will you, rest you in my arms, rest you responding
To wind's whistle above you in the tall unscythed grasses,
Quail of the covey, will you, and rest you
Nestled in the grasses, in the unflushed grasses
As I follow, and I will follow:

The moon through the thin twittering leaves
Is peaceful, and sweet rest lies upon the sleeping lovers,
Let us rest then as the cool dew condenses
And one pale cloud across the moon glides over,
And one small bird murmurs: keep you, and sleep you."

The Centennial Edition of the Works of Sidney Lanier, 10 vols. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press) is edited by Charles R. Anderson and Associates, who believe that Sidney Lanier was, to use Shelley's words, "the inheritor of unfulfilled renown", and the greatest of Southern poets after Poe. George F. Wicher says, "Some have been willing to dismiss this poet as an inferior Swinburne, whose vogue has now happily declined. Others in reaction have gone to great lengths in his praise, none more recklessly than John Macy, when he declared: 'Three volumes of unimpeachable poetry have been written in America: *Leaves of Grass*, the thin volume of Poe, and the poetry of Sidney Lanier'".

Freedom's Farm, by Josephine Young Case (Houghton Mifflin Co.) is her second poetic volume. She is a daughter of Owen Young and it is said of her poetry that "it always stays close to the deep and actual experience of her readers".

Josephine Young Case writes me: "I am interested in all kinds of poetry and indeed of writing, but especially in the place of man in nature as a subject; but then—what poet is not?" A number of these poems are not titled, but the following, written in 1940, will interest the reader:

"The stern earth gives no answer to our cries
And bears our blows with iron fortitude
Knowing within its molten heart more power
For devastation than is in these guns,
The miniature destruction of these bombs.
The tides along the shore, the mountain fires,
The woods laid down by hurricane or ice,
The quaking ground, the river demons loosed,
Are tools prepared for mightier death and sorrow
That may be never or may be to-morrow."

The last ten pages in this volume are devoted to the long sequence which gives the book its title, a poetic presentation of the story of America.

America and the world at large has lost a great friend of poetry and the culture of the English-speaking race in the death of Curtis Hidden Page, who was the President of the American Poetry Society in 1924, and for many years a Vice-President of The Poetry Society. Major Page, as he preferred to be called, died in Laconia, New Hampshire, on December 12, 1946. The account given in the Official Bulletin of the Poetry Society of America gives but small indication of the genius and friendship of this cultured gentleman.

At Christmas time I was particularly pleased to have from Johannesburg, new poems by A. Vine Hall, who at eighty-five offers mature "Fruit from an Old Tree", which has never abated its spring-like efflorescence.

ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

THE LYRIC IN POETRY

FLORENCE HAMILTON, 44 Morningside Drive, New York, 25, N.Y., writes: After 25 years of association with our beloved poet, Edwin Markham, as secretary and collaborator, I have found that the one leading factor in poetry is the lyric. Mrs. Bartlett has asked me to say something about it, and here in America a request from Mrs. Bartlett is tantamount to a command. So I have this to say about the lyric.

The Ancient Mariner can no longer detain a listener. In an age of speed and of manifold diversions, to compete, poetry must have impact, compression and brevity. The poet must be, in Hopkins' phrase, something like the auctioneer calling—"Look what I have here!" Earlier ages had no such diversions as radio, cinema, a popular press, a daily world drama, capsule culture. Even the Victorians could count on a leisurely audience, and the content of a Santayana sonnet or of a Stevens lyric could be spun out to half the length of *In Memoriam*. Now one has to go back almost to Donne to find a past master pronouncedly modern in spirit. Even such true poets as Blake and Clare, with their lyrical brevity, lack the intellectual compression to be found in the best of Donne.

Compression, of course, has the obvious danger that it may press out all song, even as it sometimes does in the verse of the great Elizabethans. We all know a number of modern poets, such as Graves and Tate, who often pack tremendous meanings into their lines. The lines themselves, however, frequently have the isolation of epigram, and too often the poem itself fails to lift into flight.

The Elizabethan poet was asked to sing even when he had nothing to say, and a certain charm still lies in the trifles. In later times such spontaneous song is notably rare. Poetry has moved too far from music as music—since Mozart—has moved too far from the dance. The pedestrian, the thoughtful, in other words the semi-artists, have moved in.

The lyric obviously must be brought back closer to the lyre. The more it carries, of course, in addition to its music, the more important its value as poetry. But there must be the thrill of movement in the thing itself. Baudelaire somewhere remarks that a poet is a man who can be young at will. There is something of that miracle in such lyrics as *Dover Beach*, where it is as if youth were singing with all the experience of the old.

Certainly the lyric fails of its prime function if it does not sing, if it lacks the native breath of musical life. Otherwise the reader is perfectly privileged to ask, why wasn't it written in out-and-out prose?

All too rare in modern verse are such beginnings as:

*Away from days too cold,
Away from hearts too old,
Honey-Mouth, O Honey-Mouth
I go to the Isles of Gold.*

Or such conclusions as the following, also from a little-known poet on this side of the waters:

*The bough-gray squirrel now skims
Through trees where none had viewed him,
The cold runs the morning field
As if the sun pursued him.
On the living bough
Dewdrops like diamonds cling,
Rabbits tumble in their play,
For want of words, birds sing.*

The cadences of Mother Goose can still carry thought as in Hardy and MacNeice. And in such lines as Wallace Stevens':

*Beauty is momentary in the mind—
The fitful tracing of a portal,
But in the flesh it is immortal.*

* * *

I have been asked by Mrs. Bartlett to write somewhat of my own work. I might say briefly that my ordinary thought does not interest me but, for those sudden perceptions—"denied even to thought"—I have found the lyric most admirably suited. Even in the brief lyric, of course, one still can add to the world's commonplace but there is always the double charm of brevity and sound: in short, its music is there to charm if nothing else is.

Goethe said, "The world is served, after all, only by what is out of the ordinary". The more one thinks of the statement the more true it becomes: of science, politics, philosophy—of all that stirs the slothful creature, man, to get up and along. Certainly it is a passion for the extraordinary that enters into the making of living art. (Particularly, since—with half the effort and time—one could turn out the actuality and factuality the world and its wife always buy.) In the sphere of the mind, however, the plausible miracle may still be come upon—in thought, in science, in art. It is the joy, the height of such a pursuit, that leads one on. It is a compelling pursuit, and, as Hardy wryly observed, one that is very likely to unfit the practicer for the ordinary business of living.

While it may seem to contain little of "revelation", "Blackbirds" from one of my early books may serve as an *envoi*, since it is something of a comment on song itself:

*The heron mist takes flight, the earth
Is once more Eden new!
The tree-top squirrel in suit of fur
Now takes his morning view.
Tailored and white a rabbit scuds
Across the smoking grass;
The hills put on their gold again;
A flock of blackbirds pass
Miraculous with life—a loud
Sensual brawling thieving cloud
That every morning fills the boughs
Of the field's one leafless tree.
(O may they, on grave Yggdrasil,
Brawl as pleasantly!)*

Dublin[★]

SHE is the Enchanted Beauty of the world,
Smiling in secret, while the cobwebs creep
About her tall, grave houses, and unfurled
Like banners waver in a wind asleep.

They are but ghosts the crowds that move and meet,
Or sightseers thronging an empty shrine,
Death only rides triumphant in her street
With tossing plumes and carriages in line;

And of her dreams? An old song in her ear?
Or footsteps faintly heard of midnight rover?
She stirs and sighs, but there is no one there,
And a shot fired at dark is quickly over.

Or does she muse in her enchanted night
Of all the wit and beauty of her birth,
The songs and sorrows, when she kindled a light
To wake the fire of life in a cold earth?

No more—the ghostlike crowds go in to pray
And the leaves whisper on the winter tree,
Somewhere a thin, cracked voice laughs far away,
An old old woman gossiping at tea . . .

She is the Enchanted Princess of the World
And the stars danced and the winds sang her birth;
And though she sleeps the days and years away,
Strange flowers grow and climb in her black earth.

L. E. Brodie.

The Premium Editor's Report

I HAVE often suggested that the making of poetry is a matter of moral quality and not of literary ability although the latter is necessary; meaning, of course, that poets are born not made, although the essential moral impulse may on occasion visit anybody. I am well aware that a contrary opinion exists, especially among young and especially gifted writers of verse, who hold that emotion may be created by art with a sufficient reality to appear genuine to the reader. I do not believe this to be so more than I believe that an actor can persuade his audience to any sincerity of feeling beyond that with which he himself is inspired by his part. The undoubted strain of good acting is due, of course, to that need for as complete an identification of the actor with the character as is possible to him, not to the need for remembering his lines or any such mechanical matter. That is why the cultivation of an introverted habit of mind is essential to the poet and that is what I mean by moral quality, using the word not in an ethical but a temperamental sense.

It follows, if my view is sound, that poetry needs to be motivated by an adequate emotional impulse. The sensitiveness of the poet's mind to outside stimuli is therefore no more important than the habit, which he may cultivate, of identifying himself with what he perceives or imagines. That identification is where the introversion comes in. It is a form of spiritual gestation, the fruit of which is poetry. I have been asked often how then may one acquire a sufficient prosodic skill if one must wait for an emotional afflatus before putting pen to paper. I reply, from a perhaps inadequate personal experience, that much practice is not necessary. Writing is not a craft that can be or needs to be learnt; it is an instinct or it is nought. Inevitably there will be an itch to write and this cannot be resisted while it develops. But it will always be more greatly advanced by an emotional urge for poetic expression than by diligent versifying. At such times of inspiration the tyro has the gift of tongues, and it is significant that he will not thereafter fall below the standard which he then achieved so effortlessly.

These beliefs have led me to the opinion that egotism, in the sense of an undue awareness of self, is the poet's worst enemy. Every man is that to himself anyway, but the creative artist is more vulnerable than the rest to self stultification—no doubt because his work must have so delicate a spiritual quality. And yet some egotism is as essential to man, as we know him, as the instinct of self-preservation, indeed these may be identified with one another. The fault lies in allowing an essential and natural egotism to develop into careerism, to become prideful or arrogant or greedy. It would seem almost as if the true creative artist must be exempt from such prevalent human failings, content merely to live and have his being, indifferent to any mundane need beyond a sufficient shelter and nourishment.

But the world is too much with us and its temptations too strong. The artist who succumbs to them by making his art a career prostitutes it. His choice is hard, and is not avoided by an attempt to pursue a middle way. Only if he be under no economic necessity to become famous will he have much chance to avoid choosing; and it is hard enough even then to ignore the lure of fame.

Nevertheless I believe that these are the conditions in which, alone, creative art can come to its full fruition. If there be any divided loyalty, any attempt to serve oneself in serving art, the result will be as negative as the enterprise of serving God and Mammon.

What then is the solution, the world being what it is and men the creatures of self-created circumstances. It would almost seem as if those who aspire to the sublimation of human emotion in their work should pursue it as a spare-time activity. A goodly number of those who have succeeded greatly in the past as poets, have done this; and it may well be that until mankind makes such provision for its creative artists as to render them independent of the normal struggle for existence, no better way will be found out of the dilemma. In the meantime we can all try to be humbly conscious of a talent which must not remain wrapped in its napkin but which should be served and obeyed as a trust, not exploited as a personal advantage or for an egotistical satisfaction. Only in that way can other men profit by it and talent be blessed with its full increase. The following sonnet may serve to explain both the faith and the means by which I believe poetry may be achieved:

THE POET

He that can find content in solitude,
Caught in an eddy of the stream of time,
Shall hear no voices in that quietude
But those which from his soundless deeps may climb.
These shall command, but shall not bid him rise
To seize a sceptre, nor to grub for gold,
Nor call him blind whose rapt, unseeing eyes
Seek brighter glory than the day can hold.
But they shall teach him well to spurn the lure
Of tinselled pomp or titled circumstance;
Counting both worldly gain or forfeiture
As nought beside his true inheritance,—
That he may take the truth upon his tongue
Rich with a music no man yet has sung.

More than one protest has reached me rebutting, or attempting to do so, the remarks made in my last report on the subject of colloquial abbreviations in poetry. The substance of all of them has been that the great poets of the past have taken this licence with language and that therefore there could be no objection to smaller folk doing the same. The argument is, of course, a familiar one. It amounts to no more than—let us copy what we need from the great although we can't emulate their achievement. But, indeed, the matter is not really so simple. The poets of the past has two reasons for their abbreviations, one, that they did not offend the taste of the age, and two, that they had the genius to recognise those occasions when a lapse into colloquialism added a strength and cogency to the context. To quote Browning's "Any Wife To Any Husband" to me, as one correspondent did, is therefore to offer no help to the controversy. The line "I'll say then, here's a trial and task" comes in a place where its sudden freedom from constraint is a positive gain to an emotionally surcharged context. That is to snatch a grace beyond the reach of the mere artist and the enterprise should be left to a major poet.

On the other hand there is to-day a revulsion from such freedom in serious literature and especially in the short lyrical pieces which you send in to me. It is as if there was an instinctive move towards a puritan resistance to word-truncation, to the telescoping of syllables, towards, if you like, a certain pedantry of expression, in an attempt to defend a beautiful language from too rapid a decay in a remarkably slip-shod age. Moreover (if I may change my ground a little), unlike the great poets of the past, my competitors are not masters of the situation. Where

they use their antique or modern abbreviations they have always been compelled thereto by some quite common metrical difficulty which could and should have been overcome without such compromise. This is quite another matter, and without repentance I must repeat that until we have an equal greatness let us not ape our betters in their outmoded ways. Then we shall neither want nor need to do so.

I am encouraged in my contumacy by at least an equal chorus of approval from those who shirk no technical difficulty in the erroneous belief that there is no other course. There is no substance in the charge, made in disagreement with me, that my condemnation of these things must discourage you. On the contrary you should be steeled to yet greater endeavour by the knowledge that it will repay you and you will constitute a strong bulwark against debasement.

Entries were fewer on this occasion but of the usual quality. I understand that there is some confusion as to closing dates, which may account for the present drop in the number of poems submitted. This uncertainty is due to the difficulty, till troublesome, of prompt publication, but my competitors can now make a note that the dates of closing for the rest of this year will be June 1st, August 1st, October 1st and December 1st. It would be an advantage if entries could be marked as at present for "Premium Competition" with the addition of the words—"Closing . . . 1st". This would avoid what sometimes happens, through the unpunctuality of publication, namely the inclusion of two separate entries from one competitor in the same competition. When this happens I have no option under the rules but to disqualify one of the entries.

The Premium on this occasion is awarded to three competitors in the following proportions:

£4, Wilfred Bartlett, Calverleigh, Devon.

£3, Geraldine Kalka Cash, London, W.C.1.

£3, Joan Carr, Hampstead, N.W.3.

All three poems stood out from the rest in a way that could not be ignored. Mr. Bartlett receives the larger moiety of the prize only because his poem seemed to me, after much consideration, to have a better technique than its challengers. But in dividing £10 into three parts it is a mere convenience to do it in the way I have chosen and there is no serious reflection therefore upon his challengers who, indeed, have presented poems which exhibit an originality of treatment and expression for which they deserve high commendation. As is now our custom I include the three poems here, and in the above order.

EACH WAKING DAY

BEAUTY on beauty breaks, and the tranced heart
 Absorbs each virgin wonder as it grows.
 The first green shoot—
 Oh, hear the dumb heart shout!—
 Pricks every sense awake;
 And when buds break
 Into a shower of muffled light, it seems
 All beauty wears the drapery of dreams.

How imperceptibly the tide of summer
 Transforms the green-foamed field to a lake of gold,
 While drowsy days hang blue
 And blossom clots each bough

With fragrant snows;
Until the dazed heart knows—
Even as sun-brimmed sky and rain-washed sea—
The crowning moment of satiety.

But blue days smoulder into misted dawns
And the dim dusks that shroud the dying year;
And shadows cling
To the heart which sang
All summer-long; then—wonder of flame!—
The burning hours shame
Heart's thinning hope with coloured sparks that fly
Wind-winnowed through a dull autumnal sky.

The splendour fades; each brilliant hue becomes
Red rust in woodlands where the leaf-shorn trees
Sigh, "Now, at last,
Beauty is lost"—Is lost?
Quick memories gather, and desire
Proves the hearth fire:
And, one immaculate morning, winter shows
The wide, white miles of beauty in repose.

This be my comfort—some new wonder fills
Each waking day and every void of dark;
And though my heart dissolve
In dust, a truer self
Still beauty-enraptured
Shall know the heaven-captured
Counterpart of bud and bloom and hue.
Which beauty brings eternally to view.

Wilfred Bartlett.

CRESCENDO

I AM a ripple upon the pool
Of a woman's content—but I grow.
Growth is my meaning my means a pulse.
And I grow.

My stature is now but the pigeon-egg's
Who am reason's triumph, who have no mind
Who have no desire who am need. Need. Need.
And already I take. Take and discard.

I have far to go, and my time is brief
Yet suffices. But before I may put on the armour
And badge of my tribe, the skin and the hair
And the eloquent eyes, I have bones to grow—
Bones to pillage.

I have ears now for hearkening:
I hear all the world holds

But hear it above the swish
 And the tick of my blood.
 Music I hear and the murmur of forests:
 Trumpets and battles' din:
 And the sighing of lovers:
 Rumour of rising waters.
 And the whispered admonition of the sea,
 Sound through the secret labyrinths
 Of my ears. I lie with my chin
 Sunk on my narrow chest and my new-budded
 Eyelids drooped, listening, listening,
 Making no sound.

But I grow and increase.

You would reckon it easeful to lie
 Through the nine-month night of the womb?
 You will speak of the psyche yearning
 To pillow herself once again
 On the cushioned warmth of that night?
 Here is the mainspring of Anger
 And here that of Lust. Envy begins here
 And Covetousness
 Lust is the psyche's despair
 Of returning thither: Sloth legacy
 Of this ceaseless endeavour, and Gluttony only
 The inverted memory of need.
 These are the sins of the flesh
 In and out of the womb.
 Pride has no place here since Pride
 Is the sin of the mind in the world.

Now I have lungs for weeping,
 I strain at the leash of my life
 For the torment and ferment of living.
 Omega henceforth from Alpha divided
 End from beginning divorced:
 The united pursuing the peace
 Of the solitary: the lonely
 Intent on reunion. I wear now
 The garb and the guise of my tribe.
 I am male or female, determinate.

Prisoned and pent up in flesh
 I lie with my chin on my narrow chest
 And look with the visionless buds of my eyes
 Backwards into my blood, to the race.
 They were helpless and strove even as I;
 They were blind and saw even as I;
 Even as I they were frail, yet they grew.
 Who then am I?
 I am the pearl in creation's shell—

THE POETRY REVIEW

I am the hunter who preys to live,
And the priest who prays to die—
I am poet and ragged scholar—
I am the blind beggar upon the roads—
I am minstrelsy and power—
I am the king in Thomond,
And the child by the Blue Crane's Creek,
I am all saints and all unbelievers.
My one gift is pain. And ever I take
And discard.

Pent in my prison of flesh
Who would wander their way with the winds,
Chained to the span of brief years
Who have blazing within me the fire
Of unperishing stars!
On my rose crumpled lips burns the flavour
From Eden remembered,
The fruit of the terrible tree
That grew to perfection in Paradise
Under the gaze of God,
The grape of the great Vine of Love
That I hunger and hasten to taste.

So I come to the threshold of life
Ripe now for battle am I, armed,
With high cunning, in nakedness; adept
In helplessness, and graduated.
My weapons? These nails pink and soft
As a peony petal.
So I come to the threshold of life.
Hark I beat on the doors of the world!
Oh make haste! Oh make haste!
I have only these fugitive years
Of a childhood wherein
To unlearn all my blood,
To forget the womb's strife
From the I achieve You
But first, first let me sleep
Oh make haste! Oh make haste!

Geraldine Kalka Cash.

LITANY OF INQUIETUDE

FROM the hearth and from the home
Must uprise my singing form.
In this tasking and content
Measured thinking be not spent.
In felicity and ease
Thirst for song find no surcease.

Oh God, have mercy on my soul
And grant me power to sing.

Oh God, have mercy on my soul
 And all my mothering.
 In excellence of woman's work,
 The task, the toil, the pain,
 Let me but sometimes breathe the air,
 The turfed, peaty, stinging air,
 Of poetry's foothills, and declare
 The massive ranging of her plain
 Incomparably fair.

No wild adventure crush my nerve
 By choice, or fate's design,
 Parabola to blast the curve,
 The swift symmetric, gracious line
 Of rare tranquillity.
 I shun the fight for life's degree,
 Its grief, its ordered agony,
 The brand of martyrdom.
 No victim of a creed's decree,
 Economy or sophistry,
 Lord, let me be.

I dare not wonder, yet would know
 How violate the heart—
 That grafted fruit of tyranny
 Enclosed in camps of blasphemy,
 There plucked for scientific aims
 Of mind's apostate sanctity,
 For knowledge utterly profane.

Oh God, have mercy on their souls,
 Who took the devil's thrust,
 And if they broke—oh pity them,
 Whose carnage is for us.

Within the compass of the home,
 In children's trust, and tears,
 In service and in constancy,
 In faith, and hope, and fears,
 Oh God, have mercy on my soul
 And grant me power to sing:
 Strength to proscribe thought's vanity,
 To know intensest purity
 Of motive, form and theme.

In patience and in ecstasy,
 In peace, and anger curbed,
 In insight and in idiocy,
 Have mercy on me, Lord.
 In hours of aimless wandering,
 In concentrated might,
 In terror and stupidity,
 Lord, grant me light.

In the teacup threnody of domestic song,
 I will challenge pithily
 All the alehouse crudity,
 Riches, benison and warmth
 Of relaxed humanity.
 Enviously will dream of pubs
 And their ancient bonhomie,
 As I drink a milder brew
 And indite my song to you;
 In my laughter, deeply grieving
 That the deep, dark prayer of thinking
 Is become the child of teasing,
 Mocking, pleasing, facile wit.

When the surgeon, forward bending,
 Burning in his zeal and aim,
 Doth describe his end and striving,
 To obliterate the pain
 Of the shadowed childbed fear
 From the eaten hearts of women—
 Hath he rid the hearts of mankind
 Of the mystery, the terror
 Of their faltering, their failing,
 And their ultimate despair?

Can the unknown be subjected,
 Made amenable to ease,
 To the comforts of the mystery
 Simplified, set out to please?
 Truly, truly, you know wholly
 All the muscular travail,
 Knowest too the extensive travelling
 Of the soul?

From all slickness of perceiving,
 From too facile comprehending,
 From the simplifying sin,
 Lord, deliver me.

Where the words do break asunder
 And sense rhythm barks its bone
 In a graceless, tumbling jumble
 That destroys the soaring cone:
 Then this rhythmic, moulding matter,
 Gathering-in of thought and feeling,
 Doth deride man's understanding,
 And destroys the bridal spiral
 In its mystic zone of joy.

In my searching, am I seeking
 Source of fear, to worship it,
 Not some new reportage making

THE PREMIUM POEMS

Of strange territories of sense,
Maddening, burning, hating, deadening,
Gentler-hearted men:
Or like science—an exploring,
Purposeful for use and storing,
Seeking mastery, cage-making,
Planning zoos for Godhead's show.

In this vanity and raging,
Lord, have mercy on my soul.

Joan Carr.

The **HIGHLY COMMENDED** list contains, as usual, very good poems, but not any which fly quite as strongly or as high as these three. It is as follows:

Mabel A. Beeken, Iver.	Phyllis Lyth, Barnes, S.W.13.
Wrenne Jarman, Richmond	Juanita Peirse, Chelsea, S.W.3.
John C. Lyth, Barnes, S.W.13.	Winifred V. Wall, Liverpool, 20.

The **COMMENDED** list is notable for poems wherein perhaps the literary quality is more apparent than the emotional power. However, none of them lack entirely this title to poetic status, and their easy competence is evidence enough that when a sufficient stimulus is provided there will be no technical barrier to greater achievement:

Thetis Blacker, Shamley Green.	G. Slade-Baker, Southsea.
G. J. Blundell, East Malling.	G. A. Squires, Haddiscoe.
Helen Shackleton Brietzche, Harrow.	Muriel Symmons, Salcombe.
Alan Dane, Dorking.	E. Doris Taylor, Liverpool, 17.
Beryl M. Davies, Abergavenny.	Neill Wells, Dublin.
L. M. Meyrick-Jones, Cheltenham.	Thomas Demarden Williams, High-
Eric Peters, London, N.W.3.	gate, N.6.
Thomas Rhymer, Twickenham.	Lewis Wilshire, Bristol.

For details of the regular premium and other verse competitions, see page vi.

Professor George Thomson, of Birmingham University, lecturing on the roots of modern English poetry recently, said: "The essential function of poetry is still magical, as it was in primitive times. Poetry seeks to effect a revolution in our attitude to the world. The function of magic is to change the actual world indirectly by changing the subjective view of the individual towards actuality".

During the past few years he had made a close study of primitive poetry. He found that such poetry was always improvised, always accompanied by dance or music, or by both, and always of a magical nature.

To-day, of course, poetry was far removed from its primitive level. It had been divorced from the dance or musical accompaniment, and it no longer satisfied a purely physical need. But it still retained the hallmarks of its genesis. The poet, if he was a good one, invariably expressed what many others felt but were unable to express. Instead of physical needs he now satisfied spiritual longing, perhaps resolved emotional conflict. In so doing the primitive function had merely been raised to a higher level. Yet, analysing modern poetry, we would best understand it if we considered its primary musical, magical and dance content.

THE RETURN TO UNIVERSALITY

A Pronouncement by the President of the Poetry Society of Texas

Experimentation certainly has its place in poetry as in any other field. Experimentation is wholesome and may lead to improvements and strengthened growth. But it is a mistake to accept any work in its experimental stage for the finished product. It would appear that this is what critics during the past twenty years have been doing. Even granting the values of experimentation, there is no reason why the fragmentary outpourings of innovators or the semi-intelligible stammerings of bewildered individualists should be praised as the most worthy expression of our time. This emphasis on experimentation has led poetry farther in the direction of a personalized code language in which the poet can speak only to himself, or in which the members of a small group can speak only to each other; it has led poetry farther from the universal language which can speak to the mass of intelligent readers.

Poetry has always been and must remain a communicative process. Although its materials and methods are selective, its focus must always be directed outward to the reader, not inward upon the poet himself. There are evidences that the writers of America and of England are becoming more aware of this as the years go by. The war has awakened a renewed interest in poetry among the people as a whole. If the poets are willing to turn their talents in the direction of universal song, following the basic tradition of great poetry in every age, they have a chance at the present time, it seems to me, to win back much of the audience they have lost and make poetry once again a vital factor in the lives of men.

But if poets are to reach this audience their poems must of necessity sing in unmistakable terms those beliefs, those aspirations, those dreams which have been awakened in the minds of people. There must be less confusion, less bewilderment, less hopelessness, less frustration, less despair, less chaos and more order, less pessimism and more hope. The younger poets are realizing this, and there are evidences that they are moving into the post-war period with a clearer understanding of the true function of poetry than their immediate predecessors had. In the postscript to his recent volume, Louis MacNeice, after characterizing recent contemporary poetry as the product of "lungs that are black, tongues that are dry", concludes by saying that modern poetry, to meet the needs of our day,

. . . requires a new
Shuffle of cards behind the brain
Where meaning shall remarry colour
And flowers be timeless once again.

It is an encouraging sign when poets feel the need for such a shuffle. And that clarity and form and melody are resuming their place in poetry.

The Poetry Society of Texas, Dallas, Texas.

DAVID RUSSELL.

BYRON NOW

I think perhaps that the following extracts taken from a letter written by Lord Byron (during his mission in Italy) to Thomas Moore should be of service to demonstrate that this great-souled poet has had a false computation attached to his character. These unequivocal statements will show him to possess, not only the courage well known to us by his death for the freedom of Greece, but also humanity, resource and a high-minded disregard for the petty emotions of

antagonistic elements, each of which should easily outweigh the faults he is alleged to have possessed:

"I open my letter to tell you a fact, which will show the state of this country better than I can. The commandant of the troops is now lying dead in my house. He was shot at a little past eight o'clock about two hundred paces from my door . . . I immediately ran down calling on Tita (the bravest of them) to follow me. The rest wanted to hinder us from going, as it is the custom for everybody here, it seems, to run away from the stricken deer. However we ran down and found him lying on his back almost, if not quite, dead . . . Some soldiers cocked their guns and wanted to hinder me from passing. However we passed . . . and as no one would do anything but howl and pray and as no one would stir a finger to move him for fear of consequences I lost my patience—made my servant and a couple of the mob take up the body . . . I had the commandant carried upstairs to my own quarter. I had him partly stripped—made the surgeon examine him and examined him myself . . . You are to know that if I had not had the body moved they would have left him there till morning in the street, for fear of consequences. I would not choose to let even a dog die in such a manner without succour: and as for consequences I care for none in a duty."

Clifford, Hereford.

ARTHUR ROW.

THE PURPOSE AND PROCESS OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Can you spare me a little space in which to reply to Mr. Bourne?

1. Mr. Bourne says quite rightly that we don't know very much about the working of the human mind. But one thing we do know is that every now and then it reaches to some new discovery or some new inspiration beyond the bounds of logical consecution, and *that* is outside the capacity of any process of thought. When I referred to the *unconscious* mind I meant the *unconscious* and not the *subconscious* mind; I meant that part of the mind which is beyond the normal processes of thought. So did Professor Graham Wallas. I don't believe that even "Paradise Lost" which, in common with thousands of other literate people, I consider far too long and for the most part inordinately dull, was written as the result of a process of thought in the way, for instance, that Mr. Bourne's letter was written. I believe it came from an exaltation of mind, just as Mr. Bourne does. I say that the exaltation emanated from the unconscious mind; Mr. Bourne says that's nebulous—but it isn't so nebulous as not suggesting any place it could come from, which is Mr. Bourne's alternative.

2. The border-line intellect/emotion is obviously of the vaguest definition. Intellect naturally plays its part in all poetry; you find it in the construction of the word-sense, and then you find it again in the application of metre (or rhythm) and word-sound to the demands of the word-sense; but you don't expect to find it in the total poetical significance of the poem so as to make it all add up to a province of thought instead of to a function of feeling. I don't myself think that what is exciting about the lines Mr. Bourne quotes is that they mean that 'she' is like an ear-ring; but it is the combination of metre, and word-sound, and word-sense which provides the effect, the effect is *not* that produced by any simile between a woman and an ear-ring, and I don't think it was artificially and deliberately contrived. I am not frightened of intellect in poetry; I merely say that it must be informed by emotion. And then I go further and say that the kind of emotion (or intellect) which informed the lines quoted by Mr. Bourne is obviously not the same kind of emotion (or intellect) as that which informs the

lines by T. S. Eliot which run

"I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place".

And I explain *why* it isn't, and what the new emotion (or intellect) is; and Mr. Bourne disregards all that. But he doesn't offer any other explanation.

3. The point I made was, quite baldly, that there has been a complete metastasis of man's emotional nature occasioned by the obtrusion into his working consciousness of the awareness of becoming. My remarks were thus not "more or less relative", but directly pertinent to the whole consideration of poetry which, however much the intellect may obtrude, has its basis in excitement. It is not an easy argument to develop in 4,000 words, but it so happens that poetry provides the most striking confirmatory evidence of the event which is general (of course) and not particular. Similar evidence can be adduced, not so easily intelligible, from the other arts and from the whole behaviour of contemporary man.

4. Finally, the conception of 'becoming' is not mine—it is Bergson's, and Sir Arthur Eddington's, and Professor Whitehead's and, of course, Einstein's. My contribution is merely to comment on the circumstances that the *realization* of becoming was never remarked at all in the human race until a comparatively short while ago. With all due respect to Mr. Bourne I don't think he has appreciated the implications of my Eddington quotation. The human race has certainly always grasped the notion of existence because it itself existed; but no one before Darwin had any real conception of 'becoming' and no one before Bergson put the conception into words. It isn't just a matter of change and decay in all around I see, nor of the old order changing giving place to new—I should have thought that would have been clear from even so short an analysis as mine was. And for Eddington to be able to say that man to-day can grasp the notion of 'becoming' as clearly and as certainly as man yesterday grasped the motion of existence is to imply at the least the development of an added competence in man. Because although the universe has always, in fact, consisted of a system of 'becoming', man has never, in fact, appreciated it until to-day. Mr. Bourne may prefer to think that things endure because they exist, as all the world always has thought until to-day; but he has against him at the moment the entire weight of modern physical science. He may not like its conceptions, but he cannot deny the truth of its conclusions, which recently brought rather forcible attention to themselves in the shape of an atomic bomb.

Edinburgh.

JOHN NANCE.

"MODERN POETRY"

(On hearing Mr. Dylan Thomas read his own verse)

Last night I sat and listened long
In a small and crowded room
To a young man dressed in a purple vest
Who read from a book of doom.

He said what he read was poetry
And his voice it rose and fell
And his face flushed red and he wagged his head
Like a demon out of hell.

"MODERN POETRY"

I listened long to the spate of words,
And at last I rose to go;
But I turned again when I saw two men
Who sat in the farthest row;

For one of the men had a high bald head
And the other a great grey beard,
And they whispered low as they watched the show,
And these were the words I heard:

The greybeard said, as he swung his cape
Where it hung from his shoulder still,
"If this be verse, then is thine worse
Than a wasted labour, Will!"

But the other answered "Nay, my lord,
I'll wager that we'll be read
And roll on down the centuries—ay, thunder down
the centuries—
When this poor stuff is dead!"

Barnes, S.W. 13.

JOHN C. LYTH.

POETRY AND THE ARTIFICIAL

It has been a favourite resort of literary critics, at least since the early years of this century, to reproach the contemporary poet for his artificial style. Such censure, though it is sometimes justified, shares the common fallacy of all generalizations in that it brands unjustly the innocent with the guilty; even condemning forms of art which, so far from displaying artificiality, concentrate themselves to the elimination of that vice. No one can deny that poetry, at times the most meticulous of the fine arts, relies for its very identity if not on artificiality at least on something of artifice. The distinction to be made would be best exemplified by these quotations; one is from the works of that Giovanni who was the correspondent of Dante, the other is, of course, from Milton.

"Non seque umanità, ma piu che drago
Crudel sì monstra e fiera e velenosa
La donna tua silvaggia ed orgogliosa
Di cui, solo a pensar, la vita ismago."

"When I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless . . ."

Here we have two distinctive pieces of verse. The first is remarkable for extravagance of expression, although dealing with a subject far less moving than that of the second quotation. This latter, from Milton's Sonnet on his Blindness, is in contrast more continent and more effectively sincere, as befits the more tragic theme.

To deal, however, with the spirit of separate poems is a thankless and unproductive task. What we are considering here is rather the style than the subject, and the style of these two pieces is in very distinct forms. The artificiality of the Italian

sonnet lies not in the basic style itself, but in the unskilful handling thereof. It is sometimes alleged that the classical idiom of certain of Milton's poems renders them distasteful. Yet the *Lycidas* is as classical in form as a poem could ever be, for example:

"Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring . . ."

and again:

"Return Alphaeus, the dread voice is past
That shrank thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,
And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
Their Beds and Flourets of a thousand hues."

Such poetry is in the strictest classical vein of Virgil and Theocritus, and yet it is free from any jarring artificiality. Admittedly there is artifice in the classical form, yet it is only in clumsy handling of that artifice that artificiality becomes apparent. The unreliable criterion of Individual Taste is involved in any judgement of this sort, but the extremes of artificiality are easily recognized, as artifice that has failed.

Reference has been made to Theocritus, and that not without a deeper purpose, for to him the origin of much of our British poetry may be traced. From the Renaissance to the present day that style has been sedulously imitated, and to some extent adapted, by generations of poets of the classical school. Yet in adopting the idioms and the poetic conceits of the Greeks our poets sometimes failed to attain that simplicity which to the best of the Greeks was synonymous with sincerity. "We are lovers of Beauty, yet simple in our tastes", was the boast of Pericles.

Imitation qua imitation is never the parent of great poetry, for in imitating a work of art we tend to dwell upon the surface, on superficialities. In applying ourselves to details of form we foster that false standard of criticism which would condemn a poem for a defect in metre, and would condone any piece of verse which adhered strictly to the physical rules, however shallow might be the thought behind the words. Just as a man reading good prose may pass over a misprint without noticing it, because what he is reading he sees as a whole and thus overlooks technical flaws, so in the reading of great poetry we can forgive a few metrical and similar licenses.

Artificiality in its worst sense, then, is imitative, and relies upon past standards without improving thereon. Yet let it not be assumed that the use of the more obvious literary devices is to be frowned upon for that reason. Consider for a moment the final lines of Tennyson's "Come Down O Maid."

"Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawns,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

Here is onomatopoeia carried to an extreme, and yet, so long as it achieves the object which was intended, it remains merely artifice, without being artificial. Though misuse of literary devices is to be deplored we cannot but admire these same forms when they are employed with skill. One may suggest that it is for our literary critics themselves to attempt to fix the standards by which we are to judge such works. To condemn all imitative devices is as irrational as to discard metrical form merely on the ground that it is misused by certain minor poets. The "greatness" of a poem lies often in the introduction of new forms admittedly, but no less in clever use of the old.

It is tempting, and perhaps not unduly optimistic, to suggest that modern art

—not the exaggerated styles which are to-day's fashion and to-morrow's recollection—but the slow trends of the century which develope behind all the virtuosity of the too-original schools, is, apart from the epic which, alas, is moribund, gradually returning to the standards set by the classic poets and discarding artificiality with a little of the artifice. As prose requires a touch of the colloquial sometimes if it is to retain the vital clarity of its expression, so to a less extent does poetry. Its language must always be on a higher plane, of course, but the infusion of new vitality is always desirable. The true poets of our generation are attempting this. It is one of poetry's attributes that when skilfully used it can express far finer shades of feeling than can prose, and even though some of our contemporaries may confuse sincerity with the sordid and seek their art in an abyss, yet their ultimate aim is laudable."

It is one of the few gifts of passing time that with it comes the power of discrimination. So long as the work of our great poets remains we have the criteria. We are justified neither in keeping too scrupulously to their idioms nor in deliberately flouting them.

Art is chiefly a means of perpetuating experience, and great art is the recorded experience of exceptional personalities. Therein lies the justification for art, since it is most desirable that such experience should be perpetuated. The conventions of everyday speech and behaviour condemn us to a life of understatement, and, from the aesthetic as well as from the psychological aspect, it is essential for man's well-being that he possess some alternative means whereby, in conveying the impression of a beautiful object or experience, he can do that object or experience full justice. So long as a poem is governed by the thought and the experience of the poet it retains its high standard of value no matter how much artifice is employed toward that end. It is when the experience is consciously sought with the intention of producing from it a work of art that the same art runs the danger of becoming meretricious.

Walton, Liverpool 9.

A. J. BAIRD.

FELICITOUS PHRASES

Would it intensify interest in poetry to suggest a parallel inquiry to that instituted by Mr. Christmas Humphreys—the collection of examples of the apt felicitous original phrase in modern poetry. The absence of the quotable line has been deplored but it is not completely missing; decoration has been condemned in recent years of austerity of expression but it has not been completely discarded. Tennyson, the master of imagery and observation, is matched by Walter de la Mare's recognition of the withering hawthorn blossom as "the rusted coverts of the may". Recently I had occasion to rejoice in "the feline snow that crouches by the lake" and "the hushed cathedral carpet of the larches" defined by Richard Church, and a Poetry Reviewer startles us by seeing the autumn leaves "descending like angels dispossessed of paradise". Can you match these arresting phrases with a dozen or a score of others drawn from contemporary poetry? If so, send them, with the appropriate references, on a postcard to the Editor; or if a sheet of paper is used it may be sent in an unsealed envelope bearing a penny stamp, endorsed "Press Matter only". Let the search proceed in library and classroom with an intensified reading of contemporary verse and the eager matching of lines by participants in this delightful pursuit.

London, W.

G. E. M.

In the discussion in the *Review* anent the definition of what is poetry I think your readers, as they glance through the following sonnet of Shakespeare (No. xxix),

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone bewail my outcast state
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least.
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state?
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at Heaven's gate——

will experience—or ought to—a thrill at beginning of line ten (—that ice-water-down-the-spine feeling mentioned by Housman or the sensation of the top of one's head flying off, mentioned, I think, by Elinor Wylie). But why? Because with the beginning of line ten *the lines catch fire!* This is where the poetry of the sonnet begins, the previous lines being mere pedestrian verse, and if this part of sonnet leaves any of your readers cold it is safe to predict that they will never reach the promised land.

Webster Grove, Mo.

J. R. CLEMENS.

IVY F. SMYTHEMAN, PAPATOETOE, N.Z., ADDRESSES AN EXHORTATION
TO POETS

Out of bitter travail
Reels mankind
Into a new confusion!
No peace—but chaos, fear, and disillusion;
No light—but brooding shadow;
No promise—but a threat that daunts the mind.

We have shared the sorrow,
Known the stress,
Wept for the beauty broken,
For stifled thought, for poetry unspoken . . .
But now, with words returning,
We must not dwell on grief and bitterness.

Let us, out of darkness,
Out of pain,
Rise to our ancient duty—
To find for men new hope, new faith, new beauty;
Kindle a light to guide them,
And walk with them to peace and life again.

The help and encouragement I have received from THE POETRY REVIEW is beyond words. It has taught me more than I can say.—WINIFRED V. WALL, Liverpool.